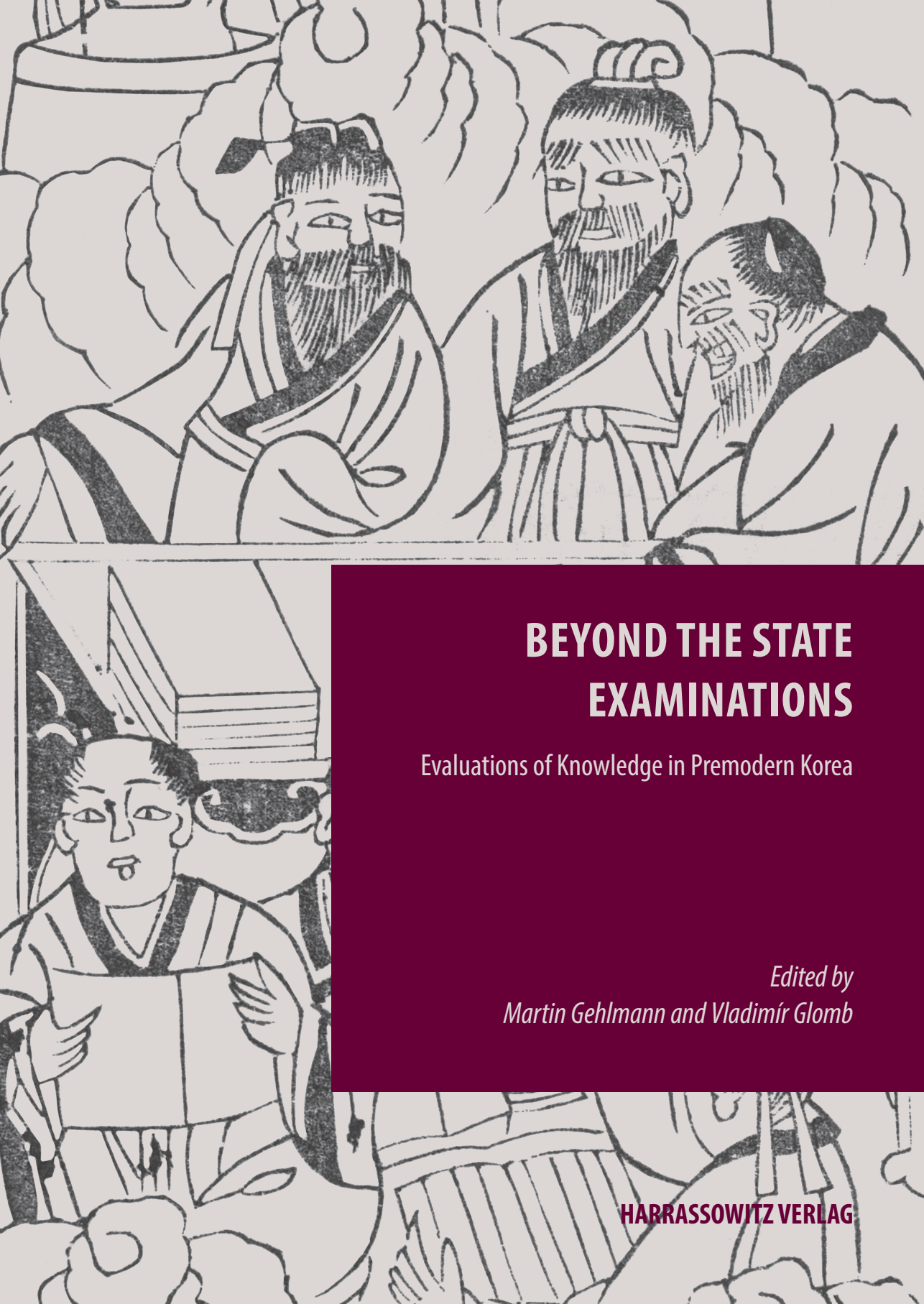

BEYOND THE STATE EXAMINATIONS

Evaluations of Knowledge in Premodern Korea

Edited by
Martin Gehlmann and Vladimír Glomb

HARRASSOWITZ VERLAG

Beyond the State Examinations

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Episteme in Bewegung

Beiträge zu einer transdisziplinären Wissensgeschichte

Herausgegeben von Gyburg Uhlmann
im Auftrag des Sonderforschungsbereichs 980
„Episteme in Bewegung.
Wissenstransfer von der Alten Welt
bis in die Frühe Neuzeit“

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Die Reihe „Episteme in Bewegung“ umfasst wissensgeschichtliche Forschungen mit einem systematischen oder historischen Schwerpunkt in der europäischen und nicht-europäischen Vormoderne. Sie fördert transdisziplinäre Beiträge, die sich mit Fragen der Genese und Dynamik von Wissensbeständen befassen, und trägt dadurch zur Etablierung vormoderner Wissensforschung als einer eigenständigen Forschungsperspektive bei.
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Preface

Andrew James Johnston and Gyburg Uhlmann

Since its inception in July 2012, the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) 980 "Episteme in Motion. Transfer of Knowledge from the Ancient World to the Early Modern Period", based at the Freie Universität Berlin, has been engaging with processes of knowledge change in premodern European and non-European cultures.

The project aims at a fundamentally new approach to the historiography of knowledge in premodern cultures. Modern scholars have frequently described premodern knowledge as static and stable, bound by tradition and highly dependent on authority, and this is a view that was often held within premodern cultures themselves.

More often than not, modern approaches to the history of premodern knowledge have been informed by historiographical notions such as 'rupture' or 'revolution', as well as by concepts of periodization explicitly or implicitly linked to a master narrative of progress.

Frequently, only a limited capacity for epistemic change and, what is more, only a limited ability to reflect on shifts in knowledge were attributed to premodern cultures, just as they were denied most forms of historical consciousness, and especially so with respect to knowledge change. In contrast, the CRC 980 seeks to demonstrate that premodern processes of knowledge change were characterised by constant flux, as well as by constant self-reflexion. These epistemic shifts and reflexions were subject to their very own dynamics, and played out in patterns that were much more complex than traditional accounts of knowledge change would have us believe.

In order to describe and conceptualise these processes of epistemic change, the CRC 980 has developed a notion of 'episteme' which encompasses 'knowledge' as well as 'scholarship' and 'science', defining knowledge as the 'knowledge of something', and thus as knowledge which stakes a claim to validity. Such claims to validity are not necessarily expressed in terms of explicit reflexion, however – rather, they constitute themselves, and are reflected, in particular practices, institutions and modes of representation, as well as in specific aesthetic and performative strategies.

In addition to this, the CRC 980 deploys a specially adapted notion of 'transfer' centred on the re-contextualisation of knowledge. Here, transfer is not understood as a mere movement from A to B, but rather in terms of intricately entan-

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gled processes of exchange that stay in motion through iteration even if, at first glance, they appear to remain in a state of stasis. In fact, actions ostensibly geared towards the transmission, fixation, canonisation and codification of a certain level of knowledge prove particularly conducive to constant epistemic change.

In collaboration with the publishing house Harrassowitz the CRC has initiated the series "Episteme in Motion. Contributions to a Transdisciplinary History of Knowledge" with a view to showcase the project's research results and to render them accessible to a wider scholarly audience. The volumes published in this series represent the full scope of collaborating academic disciplines, ranging from ancient oriental studies to medieval studies, and from Korean studies to Arabistics. While some of the volumes are the product of interdisciplinary cooperation, other monographs and discipline-specific edited collections document the findings of individual sub-projects.

What all volumes in the series have in common is the fact that they conceive of the history of premodern knowledge as a research area capable of providing insights that are of fundamental interest to scholars of modernity as well.

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Acknowledgments

Beyond the State Examinations. Evaluations of Knowledge in Premodern Korea originated in an eponymous international conference held at the Freie Universität Berlin from October 22nd to 24th in 2021. The conference was organized by the "Evaluations of Knowledge in Confucian Academies" project within the framework of the Collaborative Research Center 980 "Episteme in Motion" in Berlin. Motivation for the conference was to provide a space to rethink the meaning of evaluation of knowledge and examination cultures in premodern Korea and to explore various strategies on how diverse types of literary, artistic, moral, technical, military, or religious knowledge were evaluated, tested, examined, or measured. The founding idea behind this volume – that as soon as there is any type of knowledge transfer, it necessarily involves a subsequent evaluation – emerged during the joint debates with our colleagues at CRC in Berlin as well as scholars from the field East Asian and Korean Studies. Many ideas discussed in this volume have their origin or inspiration in previous volumes of the "Episteme in Motion" book series[1] and in many other workshops and debates held in Berlin. A special thanks belongs to Horst Simon, the mastermind behind the workshop "Asymmetries of Knowledge" held in 2019, during which the role of hierarchies in the transfer of knowledge came into focus and directly influenced the research direction of this volume. We would also like to thank all our colleagues involved in the 2018 workshop "What is an Academy? Early Modern Learned Societies in a Transcultural Perspective." We are particularly indebted to Martin Urmann and his research on the prize contests of French academies, which proved to be a very useful reference in our debates on early modern knowledge evaluation mechanisms and rituals, and fostered many inspiring conversations we shared in our joint research project.

Our workshop strove to show that while any kind of knowledge transfer is accompanied by some sort of evaluation, this does not necessarily have to come in the form of a formal examination which is the kind of knowledge evaluation that is most commonly associated with East Asian educational history. The notorious state service examinations or clichéd master-disciple relationships may be the most well-known, but not necessarily the most representative parts of a much broader discourse on the evaluation of knowledge in pre-modern Korea. Explor-

1 See, for example, *Wissen in Bewegung. Institution – Iteration – Transfer*, eds. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum and Anita Traninger (Wiesbaden 2015); *Wissensoikonomien. Ordnung und Transgression vormoderner Kulturen*, eds. Nora Schmidt, Nikolas Pissis et al. (Wiesbaden 2021); or *Dynamiken der Negation. (Nicht)Wissen und negativer Transfer in vormodernen Kulturen*, eds. Şirin Dadaş and Christian Vogel (Wiesbaden 2021).

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ing new perspectives on both formal and informal modes of knowledge evaluation across diverse fields such as gender, language, technology, or religions would not have been possible without contributions from Ksenia Chizhova (Princeton University), Maya Stiller (University of Kansas), Damien Peladan (Université Bordeaux Montaigne), Lena Kondratyeva (Moscow State University), and Thorsten Traulsen (Ruhr-Universität Bochum). Their discussions about the board games of Chosŏn literati, the writing of palace women, shipbuilding techniques, and novels talking about the state examinations brought both joy and inspiration to the workshop. We hope the spirit of these discussions are at least partly present in this volume. Our book is, to a certain degree, also a dialogue with the works of our discussants: Marion Eggert (Ruhr-Universität Bochum) whose studies on circulation, location, dynamics, and integration of knowledge between Korea, China, Japan, and the West were a direct inspiration for our project[2], and Martina Deuchler, who in her research about the spread of Confucian knowledge in Korea[3] laid the foundations upon which we have sought to build this project. Above all our gratitude belongs to Eun-Jeung Lee (Freie Universität Berlin), who is the director of the project "Evaluations of Knowledge in Confucian Academies" and has supported and coordinated our efforts during the workshop, the subsequent debates, and the publication process. Technical and administrative aspects of our undertaking were backed by the steadfast support from Kristiane Hasselmann, Stefanie Fröhlich and Sofie Mörchen of the CRC 980 as well as Julia Guthmüller from Harrassowitz.

Berlin, 30th November 2023 Vladimír Glomb and Martin Gehlmann

2 *Space and Location in the Circulation of Knowledge (1400–1800): Korea and Beyond*, eds. Marion Eggert, Felix Siegmund et al. (Frankfurt a.M. 2014); *The Dynamics of Knowledge Circulation: Cases from Korea*, eds. Eun-Jeung Lee and Marion Eggert (Frankfurt a.M. 2016); and *Integration Processes in the Circulation of Knowledge: Cases from Korea*, eds. Marion Eggert and Florian Pölking (Frankfurt a.M. 2016).

3 See Martina Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors' Eyes: Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea* (Cambridge Mass. 2015).

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Introduction

Vladimír Glomb and Martin Gehlmann

When famous French medievalist Jacques Le Goff (1924–2014) introduced his "Intellectuals In the Middle Ages", he described the revolutionary changes brought about by the emergence of the concept of universities. He stressed that the West in medieval times had known only three modes of access to power: birth, wealth, and occasionally the drawing of lots. The innovative character of the university curriculum provoked a new mode of social advancement, as Le Goff stressed, through "a process which was completely new and revolutionary in Western Europe: the exam. The West thus adopted – in a small way – a system which my friend Vadime Elisseeff [1918–2002] believes should be studied from a comparatist perspective – that of the Chinese."[1]

The French historian was only one of many Western scholars fascinated by the Chinese civil examination system. Beginning with Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), who "in common with other Europeans who visited China, was fascinated by the examination system"[2] (and had had the chance to observe it personally in 1597 in Nanchang),[3] and further continued by Voltaire (1694–1778),[4] Quesnay (1694–1774),[5] 19th-century government and social reformers,[6] and many others.[7] While dis-

1 Jacques Le Goff, *Intellectuals In the Middle Ages*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Cambridge Mass. 1993), pp. xv–xvi.

2 Mary Laven, *Mission to China. Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London 2012), p. 192. On reflections of the Chinese state examination system in Europe see Eun-Jeung Lee, *'Anti-Europa.' Die Geschichte der Rezeption des Konfuzianismus und der konfuzianischen Gesellschaft seit der frühen Aufklärung. Eine ideengeschichtliche Untersuchung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen Entwicklung* (Münster 2003).

3 See Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552–1610* (Oxford 2010), p. 166.

4 See Ssu-Yü Têng, "Chinese Influence on the Western Examination System. I. Introduction", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 7, no. 4 (1943), p. 281; for the broader context of Voltaire's engagement with China see Arnold H. Rowbotham, "Voltaire, Sinophile", *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 47, no. 4 (Dec. 1932), pp. 1050–1065.

5 See Edward A. Kracke Jr., "Family vs. Merit in Chinese Civil Service Examinations under the Empire", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10, no. 2 (1947), pp. 103–104.

6 See Paul Frederick Cressey, "Chinese Traits in European Civilization. A Study in Diffusion", *American Sociological Review* 10, no. 5 (Oct. 1945), p. 603; and also John K. Fairbank, "Meadows on China. A Centennial Review", *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (May 1955), p. 368.

7 The traditional Chinese examination system still today is sometimes taken to contain lessons for modern educational systems and knowledge evaluation practices, see Barry O'Sullivan, Liying Cheng, "Lessons from the Chinese imperial examination system", *Language Testing in Asia* 12, no. 52 (2022).

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course about the meritocratic nature of the Chinese examination system diversified and became both a praised and ridiculed system in Europe,[8] serious study of it continued into the modern age and gave us the classical works that expanded our understanding of the system and its historical role, by such great scholars like E.A. Kracke,[9] Ping-Ti Ho,[10] Thomas H.C. Lee,[11] John W. Chaffee,[12] Benjamin A. Elman,[13] Hilde De Weerdt,[14] and many others.[15] Through their work, we now have a more detailed knowledge about the nature and operation of the examination system during the more or less two millennia of its existence.[16] Unsurprisingly, in most works on the social and cultural history of East Asia, the government service examination system remains a dominant topic. The majority of modern studies devoted to the Chinese, and also the Korean, civil examination system is motivated by the same question that had already fascinated Le Goff: Did the East Asian examination system offer a truly meritocratic approach to social mobility?[17] Debate on this topic further intensifies when other social and cultural characteristics

8 This debate was held most prominently in the second half of the 19th century in Britain about the introduction of examinations, in which the Chinese examination system was both invoked as an ideal and as an example of a flawed system. See James Elwick, *Making a Grade. Victorian Examinations and the Rise of Standardized Testing* (Toronto 2021), pp. 53–55.

9 See E.A. Kracke Jr., *Civil Service in Early Sung China 960–1067* (Cambridge Mass. 1953).

10 See Ping-Ti Ho, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China. Aspects of Social Mobility* (New York 1962).

11 See Thomas H.C. Lee, *Government Education and Examinations in Sung China* (Hongkong 1985); and, of course, also his seminal work, *Education in Traditional China. A History* (Leiden 2000).

12 See John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning Sung China. A Social History of Examinations* (Albany 1985, New Edition 1995).

13 See Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley 2000); and also, Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge Mass. 2013).

14 See Hilde De Weerdt, *Competition over Content. Negotiating Standards for the Civil Service Examinations in Imperial China (1127–1279)* (Cambridge Mass. 2007).

15 Of course, there are many more excellent works, both earlier and later, on this topic that were not written in English. For an overview of publications on the Chinese examination system see Rui Wang, *The Chinese Imperial Examination System. An Annotated Bibliography* (Lanham 2013).

16 In traditional historiography, the history of the examination system is often conflated with earlier recommendation systems for officials that are said to have been systematized during the Chinese Zhou (1046 BCE–256 BCE) and Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE) dynasty. The first regular written examinations were introduced during Sui dynasty (581–617) and further developed in the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. The examination system was abolished in 1905. For a short overview of the history of the Chinese civil examinations see Hilde De Weerdt, "The Chinese Civil Examinations", *Inference* 7, no. 3 (Dec. 2022), URL: https://inference-review.com/article/the-chinese-civil-examinations (04.08.2023).

17 For the Korean case see, for example, Edward W. Wagner, "The Ladder of Success in Yi Dynasty Korea", *Occasional Papers on Korea*, No. 1 (1974), pp. 1–8. Thanks to the enormous efforts of Prof. Wagner and Prof. Song June-ho, today we have a database of all passers of the Korean state examinations at our disposal that informed all later serious studies of the examination system. The topic was also extensively discussed in Korean for different periods of the Chosŏn dynasty by Han Yŏngu, *Kwagŏ, ch'ulsse ŭi sadari I-IV. Chokpo rŭl t'onghae pon chosŏn mun'gwa kŭpcheja* (P'aju 2013). For a digital humanities approach to the question see Robin Wooyeong Na, Javier Cha, "Snakes or Ladders? Measuring the Intergenerational Perfor-

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of East Asian premodern societies, which to a large degree redefined the nature of the examination system, are added to the discussion. For example, one of the most enigmatic questions for the Korean case is how an egalitarian concept like standardized testing was adopted, developed, and functioned in a strict hierarchical society like premodern Korea.[18]

The intensive focus on the civil examination system and its perception as the pinnacle of both state and private education, however, overshadows the fact that the state examinations were only one type of knowledge evaluation strategy applied in Korean society. Given our guiding assumption that every transfer of knowledge is implicitly accompanied by an evaluation of its efficiency, or in the worst case a sort of validation that any transfer occurred at all, the contributions of this book strive to explore types of knowledge, methods of evaluation, examination cultures, or the engagement of various social groups in the assessment process of knowledge transfer, production, and reproduction. From this perspective it is an attempt to move beyond the discourse about the state examination system, while acknowledging that the characteristics of its strategies of knowledge evaluation played an important part in other areas as well and can help to detect other models of different typology and purpose. Going beyond the government service examinations foremost means to stress the fact that the testing of knowledge within this particular system was male based, elite centered, and administered on a top-down hierarchy. New directions of research must therefore inevitably touch on issues of gender, all-none elite social groups – in particular artisans, medical practitioners and, of course, peasants – different religious traditions, such as Buddhism, and types of non-hierarchical peer-to-peer evaluation as is present in the poetic exchanges between Chosŏn literati.

There is a wide gap in our understanding of knowledge transfer on the Korean peninsula: Most of the existing studies focus on the exchange of ideas within the Sinosphere, i.e. political, economic, cultural, and social imports or exports of knowledge[19] as well as the integration or reproduction of knowledge within the

mance of Chosŏn's Munkwa Exam Candidates", *International Journal of Korean History* 26, No. 1 (2021), pp. 145–176.

18 The introduction of the examination system to the Korean peninsula is usually dated to the year 958 during the time of King Kwangjong (r. 949–975) of Koryŏ (918–1392). It was abolished in 1894. For a short overview of the Korean state examination system see H.W. Kang, "Institutional Borrowing. The Case of the Chinese Civil Service Examination System in Early Koryŏ", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (1974), pp. 109–125; and John B. Duncan, "Examinations and Orthodoxy in Chosŏn Dynasty Korea", in *Rethinking Confucianism. Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam*, eds. Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan, Herman Ooms (Los Angeles 2002), pp. 65–94. For an earlier description of the Korean examination system see Homer B. Hulbert, "National Examination of Korea", *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 14 (1923), pp. 9–32.

19 For example, Peter Francis Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia* (Oxford 2018); and *Rexamining the Sinosphere. Cultural Transmissions and Transformations in East Asia*, eds. Nanxiu Qian, Richard J. Smith, Bowei Zhang (Amherst 2020).

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structures of premodern society.[20] Whether focused on individuals, social groups, or technical procedures, most studies operate under the logic of detecting the starting point of a transfer process and then comparing it with the perception, alteration or adaptation of this knowledge on the receiving side, or an analysis of the objects of material culture produced during this process.

Taking into account testing or evaluations of knowledge during the various stages of the transfer process adds another perspective to these discussions: the descriptive value of such evaluations provides us with snapshots of the state of knowledge, its sanctioning, and the dynamics of knowledge transfer. The assessed level of knowledge, ability, experience, suitability, or validity of an evaluated individual, social group, or technique is caught in a momentary picture that is revealed to us by the evaluation and helps us in a quasi-Bergsonian manner to reconstruct the process of the knowledge transfer. In formalized evaluation settings, the dynamics of knowledge transfer become visible through the negotiation and sanctioning of claims to validity. However, such evaluations of knowledge, both theoretical and practical, were only rarely imposed on the involved actors or activities in a ritualized or formalized manner. Rather it remained a reflective moment accompanying every moment of an intellectual or practical endeavor. Seen from a broader perspective it is necessary to move beyond the concept of official testing and validation in a formalized exam and focus on trajectories which are leading us beyond the highlighted, and in most of the cases documented, moments of the knowledge evaluation process.

Embracing the broadest possible definition of knowledge evaluation presents a number of substantial challenges. Unlike the well-documented state examinations which were located at the apex of the social and political structure of premodern Korean society, this is not the case for many other areas. This volume necessarily deals with three issues in creating a basic, but comprehensive overview of knowledge evaluation strategies existing during Chosŏn times: First, the problem of sources and second and third, the questions about fixed or informal evaluation procedures.

Sources and Testimonies

The biggest obstacle in researching evaluations of knowledge in Chosŏn Korea (and in fact in almost every pre-modern society or culture), is the problem of extant written sources or testimonies. Despite the fact that almost every transfer of knowledge, in the broadest sense, has always been accompanied by various kinds of evaluation strategies, e.g. written examinations, simple rankings, practical tests or acceptance into a community through proof of shared knowledge, many of

20 For example, *Space and Location in the Circulation of Knowledge (1400–1800): Korea and Beyond*, eds. Marion Eggert, Felix Siegmund et al. (Frankfurt a.M. 2014); *The Dynamics of Knowledge Circulation: Cases from Korea*, eds. Eun-Jeung Lee and Marion Eggert (Frankfurt a.M. 2016); and *Integration Processes in the Circulation of Knowledge: Cases from Korea*, eds. Marion Eggert and Florian Pölking (Frankfurt a.M. 2016).

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these strategies remained unrecorded or their records were quickly discarded. Neither prescriptive evaluation criteria such as rules, formalities, and protocols, nor individual descriptions of evaluation processes, are available in great numbers today. Given the fact that the evaluation of knowledge was a processual phenomenon parallel to the transfer of knowledge, it is somewhat surprising how few documents actually remain extant. Every paper in this volume, to a large degree, is dealing with similar problems of source scarcity caused by multiple, and in many cases simultaneous, factors such as the following: archiving practices, through which many records simply vanished[21], gender or social discrimination that excluded many groups and their knowledge[22], and the informal or ordinary nature of many evaluations that considered the documentation of the results of an evaluation to be more important than the process itself. Even where testimonies are extant, it is not always possible to actually decode the criteria governing the evaluations. A prime example for the elusive nature of sources and descriptions of evaluation strategies is actually the area considered to be the best documented: the government service examinations.

While the examinations' administrative structure and history are both well described and analyzed, many questions remain unanswered on the level of evaluation. Thousands of examination essays on various topics and of several genres are at our disposal today, yet this corpus is far from being complete. Naturally, the sources are scarce for older periods and there are only a few extant examples of Koryŏ examination documents.[23] However, the far bigger problem lies within the

21 See for example the special issue of the *Journal of Korean Studies* on "Archives, Archival Practices, and the Writing of History in Premodern Korea" on this topic, see Jungwon Kim "Archives, Archival Practices, and the Writing of History in Premodern Korea: An Introduction", *Journal of Korean Studi*es 24, Issue 2 (October 2019), pp. 191–199; and also *Collect and Preserve: Institutional Contexts of Epistemic Knowledge in Pre-modern Societies*, eds. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, Jochem Kahl and Eun-Jeung Lee (Wiesbaden 2021). On the other hand, one has to admit that the Chosŏn state and its bureaucracy were, within the context of premodern social studies, exceptionally apt and thorough in composing administrative records. Seen from this perspective any frustration about extant sources is exacerbated by the fact that we can only surmise what must have existed. A good example are the records on the height and anthropological measures of militia recruits during the Chosŏn dynasty; even though the few thousand cases recorded in extant rosters present a unique set of data within a global context, it is still only a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of cases that were probably recorded. See Seong Ho Jun, James B. Lewis, Daniel Schwekendiek, "The Biological Standard of Living in Pre-modern Korea. Determinants of Height of Militia Recruits During the Chosŏn Dynasty", *Economics and Human Biology* 24 (2017), pp. 104–110.

22 See, for example, Ksenia Chizhova, *Kinship Novels of Early Modern Korea. Between Genealogical Time and the Domestic Everyday* (New York 2021), pp. 19–30.

23 To gain a glimpse into the documentation state for Koryŏ, we can take the example of one type of examination answer sheets, the essay (*taech'aengmun* 對策文): The only extant examples include essays written by famous literati Yi Kok 李穀 (1298–1351), Yi Saek 李穡 (1328–1396) and Chŏng Mongju 鄭夢周 (1337–1392) (not included are the texts composed by Yi Kok and An Ch'uk 安軸 [1282–1348] for the Yuan state examinations and also Yi Kok's and Yi Saek's texts presented to the Branch Secretariat for Eastern Expeditions 征東行省). See To Hyŏnch'ŏl, "Koryŏ hugi taech'aengmun ŭi chongnyu wa sŏnggyŏk", *P'oŭnhak yŏn'gu* 23

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selection of archived sources: the overwhelming number, if not all, of the extant examination essays are award-winning answers.[24] The examination texts of successful graduates were kept in family archives, printed in their collected works and sometimes even disseminated as learning materials for future students.[25] But what happened to unsuccessful essays? From extant examination records, we know of the large number of rejected candidates, but their essays are hardly to be found. Failed essays were not archived or treasured and candidates quickly moved to another round of state examinations, for which they had to prepare anew.[26] As many candidates made several attempts during their lives[27], the number of rejected and unknown examination essays naturally multiplied. This further contributed to the invisible submerged part of the textual iceberg that are the examination essays.

The extant corpus of the examination essays represents only the highest and thinnest layer of Chosŏn literati knowledge and skills and has minimal descriptive value concerning what was considered common, average, or unsatisfactory. However, even elite essays are plagued by serious obstacles that hamper our understanding of the process of evaluation in the state examinations. Unlike their Chinese counterparts, which in many cases were accompanied by examiners' comments, reading marks and punctuation,[28] Korean essays were just graded and crucial passages were occasionally highlighted by the examiners.[29] Similarly, ex-

(2019), pp. 53–88. Some documents related to Koryŏ examinations are included in the volume by the Jangseogak Archives of the Academy of Korean Studies, *The Questions and Answers. A New Look into the Korean State Examination System* (Sŏngnam 2019), pp. 10–15; 236–237. For an overview of the Koryŏ state examination system in Korean see Hŏ Hŭngsik, *Koryŏ ŭi kwagŏ chedo* (Seoul 2005).

24 Again looking at the genre of the examination essay (*ch'aengmun* 策文), Pak Chaegyŏng indicates 227 extant texts for early Chosŏn, including only 103 for which both question and answer are preserved, and 690 for late Chosŏn, of which only 186 can be considered complete. See Pak Chaegyŏng, "Chosŏn sidae ch'aengmun yŏn'gu" (PhD diss., Seoul National University 2014), p. 13; 21. These numbers contrast with a hundred thousand documented participants in the state examination during the Chosŏn period. For the fundamental role the state examinations played in reshaping Koryŏ society, see Martina Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors' Eyes. Kinship, Status and Locality in Premodern Korea* (Cambridge Mass. 2015), pp. 23–25.

25 Two examples could be the *Tongguk changwŏnch'aek* 東國壯元策 (Essays of the First Place Holders of the Eastern Country [Korea]) and the *Tongguk changwŏnjip* 東國壯元集 (Collection of First Place Holders of the Eastern Country).

26 See Ch'oe Yŏng-ho, *The Civil Service Examinations and the Social Structure in Early Yi Dynasty Korea: 1392–1600* (Seoul 1987), pp. 77–78.

27 The *Sŏgyŏng sihwa* 西京詩話 (Western Capital Remarks on Poetry) features an account of two Pyongyang literati that succeeded in the examinations only after they had passed the age of seventy, see Kim Chŏm, *Sŏgyŏng sihwa*, trans. Chang Yusŭng (Seoul 2021), p. 235; 536.

28 See Li Yu, "Standards of Validity and Essay Grading in Early Qing Civil Service Examinations", in *Powerful Arguments. Standards of Validity in Late Imperial China*, eds. Martin Hoffmann, Joachim Kurtz and Ari Daniel Levine (Leiden 2020), pp. 393–430. For a detailed analysis of a single case of state examination evaluation criteria, see Iona D. Man-Chong, *The Class of 1761. Examinations, State, and Elites in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford 2004).

29 See Kim Dongsuk, *Chosŏn sidae sŏnbi ŭi kwagŏ wa sigwŏn* (Sŏngnam 2021), pp. 167–172. This

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tant result sheets of the oral exams held at the beginning of the second round of the higher state examination provide us with plenty of information about the examinee (name, age, native place, and family relations), but give little evidence about the principles of assessment applied.[30] Thus, the actual evaluation criteria remain an open question, maybe never to be answered. Why certain essays, poems, or oral recitations were graded as belonging to the second lower rank – a pass – or the higher fourth rank – a fail – was known only to the commission and never precisely recorded. Winning candidates were praised for their answers but today a precise documentation of the evaluation is missing. Even the most prestigious and well-documented cases involving candidates at the highest examination level, as well as the king, unfortunately remain unrevealing. This should remind us that obfuscation of evaluation criteria is an effective strategy to avoid accountability for evaluation outcomes and that overly thorough documentation of the evaluation process can create long-term problems for examiners.

Similar, or even worse, problems with source materials can be encountered in other branches of the state examination system. Above all there is limited information how specialists in foreign languages, medicine, yin and yang studies (including astronomy, geography and mathematics) or law were selected through the miscellaneous examinations (*chapkwa* 雜科).[31] This least prestigious tier of the examination system is also its worst-documented one. Even though interpreters played an important political, diplomatic, cultural, and economic role[32] and knowledge of colloquial Chinese, Mongolian, Japanese, or Jurchen (and later Manchu) was imperative for the state affairs, there is only scarce documentation about the selection of these experts and no detailed features of their knowledge evaluation remain. While the precise contours of the interpreters' curriculum, numbers of candidates[33], and prescribed features of their examination including oral and

does not mean that grading was not a rigorous process. Korean examination papers were carefully anonymized and then graded in several steps by different examination officials. However, with increasing numbers of exam takers, the time to grade each paper reduced significantly. On Chosŏn examination papers and the grading process see Pak Hyŏnsun, *Chosŏn hugi ŭi kwagŏ* (Seoul 2014), pp. 116–130; 313–361.

30 See Kim Kyŏngyong, "Chosŏnjo kwagŏ chedo kangsŏ sigwŏn yŏn'gu", *Changsŏgak* 15 (2006), pp. 43–69.

31 For an overview of the miscellaneous examinations see Yi Sŏngmu, *Han'guk ŭi kwagŏ chedo* (Seoul 2000), pp. 162–187.

32 See Sixiang Wang, "Chosŏn's Office of Interpreters. The Apt Response and the Knowledge Culture Diplomacy", *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1 (2020), pp. 1–15; and Kim Kyung-ran, "Foreign Trade and Interpreter Officials", in *Everyday Life in Joseon-Era Korea. Economy and Society*, ed. Michael D. Shin (Leiden 2014), pp. 105–113.

33 See Song Ki-joong, *The Study of Foreign Languages in the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910)* (Seoul 2001), pp. 45–50. There are most likely no archived documents in the DPRK that would change the dismal situation concerning textual evidence about the foreign language examination process, see Kang Kyuyŏng, "Rijo chŏnban'gi yŏkkwan e taehan yŏn'gu", *Minjok kojŏn yŏn'guron munjip* 17 (2010), pp. 4–67.

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written testing are well known, there are no extant documents, which would record the very act of their examination or the precise criteria applied therein.[34]

Climbing down the social pyramid of premodern Korean society, we find less and less documents describing the features of knowledge transfer and its evaluation. The passing of knowledge between artisans, miners, or common peasants remained largely undetected by both official and private documentation. However, class cannot be seen as the only dividing line either as we neither have documentation about the practical education of commoner women, nor a precise picture about the studies of women from higher classes or even the royal family. While there is a substantial number of materials on curriculum, ideal features, and required skills for a woman in all strata of Korean society, there are only a few hints on how these skills were tested or evaluated.[35]

Standardized Forms of Knowledge Evaluation

The Chosŏn state, despite its dominant role, was not the only entity relying on a set of formalized testing and evaluation techniques. Chosŏn's social and cultural landscape hosted many communities, institutions or traditions that employed various formalized ways to test or evaluate knowledge in order to recruit members, assess talents, establish hierarchies, eliminate unsuitable candidates, and/or ensure cohesion within their group. Four studies present in this book are dealing with areas which may be described as belonging to the sphere of standardized evaluations of knowledge: Buddhist examinations, examinations within or of the Confucian literati community, and assessments of military preparedness. While there are certainly many shared aspects with techniques and traditions that can be labeled as informal, the common point of the four selected areas is that unlike the very diverse field of shamanistic traditions for example,[36] they were to a large degree recognized by the state and codified through legal prescripts. A natural side-effect of these features is a comparatively larger degree of extant written documents, but even within these areas there are lot of blank spaces to be filled.

34 Some fundamental questions concerning the study of foreign languages are likely never to be answered. A good example is the question of pronunciation: Although bilingual textbooks of spoken Chinese, like *Nogŏltae* 老乞大 (The Old Cathyan) and *Pak T'ongsa* 朴通事 (Interpreter Pak), paid great attention to this problem, there are no documents about this question in the foreign language curriculum.

35 See Michael J. Pettid, "Confucian Educational Works for Upper Status Women in Chosŏn Korea", in *Women and Confucianism in Chosŏn Korea*, eds. Youngmin Kim and Michael J. Pettid (Albany 2011), pp. 49–70.

36 For training and vocation within the Korean shamanistic tradition see Laurel Kendall, *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman. Of Tales and the Telling of Tales* (Honolulu 1988); and also Laurel Kendall, *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits* (Honolulu 1985). For the complicated role of shamans within Chosŏn society see Boudewijn Walraven, "Popular Religion in a Confucianized Society", in *Culture and State in Late Chosŏn Korea*, eds. Jahyun Kim Haboush and Martina Deuchler (Cambridge Mass. 1999), pp. 160–198.

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In a first step, moving away from the top-down state examinations toward other forms of knowledge evaluation means to focus on critiques of the state examinations and alternatives penned by examination actors: the Confucian literati. Their arguments against the government service examinations were leveled at several aspects of the system, but the fiercest criticism was directed against its technocratic and agonistic nature. In their view, indiscriminate testing of thousands of students could not take into account or assess the moral qualities of a candidate and thus veered the whole process of education towards a simple, mechanical drill for success in the examinations. According to many scholars, years of rote memorization of model books for examination essays had nothing in common with true Confucian education focused on self-cultivation and an active role in transforming others. The proliferation of Confucian academies (*sŏwŏn* 書院) in Chosŏn Korea from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards can be viewed as a material expression of this discontent.[37] Vladimír Glomb argues that early academies were consciously shaped as a Confucian alternative to the state examination system. Many academies, at least in theory, prohibited students from preparing for the state examinations in their precincts and instead strove to encourage students to concentrate on their personal moral and intellectual development. This goal required a long process of trial and error in order to develop an alternative idea of what an evaluation of student growth, if not by coercive testing, should look like. Academy rules and records of academy gatherings indicate that in many cases, academy masters actually fell back onto regular evaluation methods to assess their students' progress and improve morale, but not as an instrument of selection or elimination. The testimonies provided by academy students' evaluations give us a unique insight into the progression of Confucian studies in the lower echelons of the Chosŏn literati community.

The simple fact that not all Chosŏn literati were able to be successful, but that some were not even allowed to participate in the government service examinations forms the background for Martin Gehlmann's inquiry into the student evaluation examinations of Chosŏn local schools (*hyanggyo* 鄉校).[38] The local schools, occasionally considered secondary schools,[39] theoretically stood between elementary schools (*sŏdang* 書堂) in which children were taught basic literacy, and elite state schools or the national academy Sŏnggyun'gwan 成均館 in the capital in which students were supposed to prepare for the higher level of the state examinations. Local schools were evenly spread across the whole country in all provinces and hosted a

37 On the history of the academies see *Confucian Academies in East Asia*, eds. Vladimír Glomb, Eun-Jeung Lee et al. (Leiden 2020).

38 For a description of the place of the local school in the educational system of Chosŏn Korea see Yi Sŏngmu. "The Influence of Neo-Confucianism on Education and the Civil Service Examination System in the Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Korea", in *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, eds. Wm. Theodore de Bary and JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York 1985), pp. 125–160.

39 See Jang Dong-Pyo, "The Educational System", in *Everyday Life in Joseon-Era Korea*, pp. 200–201.

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substantial number of students, both of elite and commoner background, recruited from the local community.[40] The official status of the schools was enhanced by an obligatory Confucius shrine within their compounds. Already during Koryŏ times, local schools had been designed to be an integral part of the state education system i.e., for preparation of the state examinations. However, as Yi Sŏngmu pointed out, the connection between the public education system and the state examinations disintegrated in the fifteenth century and local schools slowly lost their role as an institution for training the elite.[41] While the population increase in middle and late Chosŏn made it far less likely for a countryside student to successfully participate in the state examinations, the local schools still offered a substantial number of privileges. Mainly, the prestigious social status as school student (*kyosaeng* 校生) on a practical level gave students the customary exemption from military service and taxes – a hallmark of elite status.[42] Local schools thus provided a possible means to social status enhancement and attracted a number of commoner students motivated by the desire to belong to the elite and escape the increasing burden of taxation.

In the seventeenth century, this development was met with a series of countermeasures issued by the state. With the introduction of a reformed student evaluation examination (*kyosaeng kogang* 校生考講), the state sought to strengthen its underfunded military after the Japanese invasions of the 1590s. Routine student evaluation examinations were adjusted to now punish failure by revoking student exemptions from military obligations. This, however, stood in stark contrast to the educational ideals promoted by the Confucian founders of the dynasty and incited strong opposition among students and scholar-officials, as it threatened their privileges and was viewed as an attack on their social status. Although the examination practice adhered to accepted patterns of evaluation used in the government service examination system, it had negative consequences in terms of social mobility and was therefore strongly rejected and boycotted by both examinees and examiners alike. Resistance against the exclusionary focus of the examinations reveals not only a general understanding of examinations and their supposed social role, but the ensuing negotiation between state and students over standards and scope of the exams provides insights about what was considered minimal knowledge of a student and how this knowledge was to be assessed.

The instrumentalization of examinations by the state to suppress a certain group was not an entirely new phenomenon and had already been used earlier to regulate the Buddhist clergy. The Buddhist tradition[43] of the premodern states on the Korean

40 See Ch'oe, *The Civil Service Examinations and the Social Structure in Early Yi Dynasty Korea*, pp. 85–99.

41 Yi Sŏngmu, *Han'guk ŭi kwagŏ chedo*, pp. 200–201.

42 See James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions. Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle 1996), p. 480.

43 While it is difficult to find a systematized form of the Daoist examinations in Korea, they are well attested in China. Daoist traditions on the peninsula nevertheless employed specific types of knowledge evaluation or practical testing of Daoist knowledge. We would argue

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peninsula, starting in the era of the Three Kingdoms, had its own specific ways of testing, evaluating, and ranking its members. As Sem Vermeersch points out in his detailed description of the Saṅgha examinations (*sŭngsŏn* 僧選), the examination system for monks even predates Confucian state examinations.[44] Yet the situation of Korean Buddhist communities radically changed with the promulgation of anti-Buddhist policies by the early Chosŏn state.[45] This brought fundamental changes to the Buddhist examination system in Korea, which had started to be used as a tool not to promote, but rather suppress the Buddhist community. Seen from a historical point of view, the Chosŏn Buddhist examination system became politicized and a casualty of the machinations to strip Buddhist clerics and Buddhist institutions of legal recognition. Gregory Evon's study examines the crucial features of this politicization of the Buddhist examinations. This is not an easy task since the Buddhist documents contain little information on the examination system and information contained in the dynastic annals cannot be considered complete and is certainly biased.[46] The Buddhist examination system in Chosŏn Korea was designed to rank and confirm the standing of monks through exams, and if one counts the initial testing required to become a monk, there were essentially two separate but related examination systems. However, there was a vast difference between theory and practice with respect to the Buddhist examinations.

Gregory Evon's contribution not only elucidates the Chosŏn Buddhist examination system in the context of the broader developments surrounding Buddhism from the start of the dynasty, but emphasizes once more the dual role of examinations as an evaluation strategy. Unlike the government service examinations or examinations taken within the Buddhist clergy, which in principle were of meritocratic nature and strove to select the best candidates for appropriate functions and positions, other forms of examinations imposed by the Chosŏn state were essentially of repressive nature. Much like in the case of the state intervention against supposedly 'fake' students in the local schools, as seen in Martin Gehlmann's

that publications describing the transmission of Daoist teachings from China to Korea up to Chosŏn times, like Han Muoe's 韓無畏 (1517–1610) *Haedong chŏndo rok* 海東傳道錄 (Record of the Transmission of the Way to the East of the Sea) or *Ch'ŏnghak chip* 青鶴集 (Record of the Blue Crane) attributed to Cho Yŏjŏk 趙汝籍 (fl. 1588), should be seen as testimonies of an informal evaluation within the Korean Daoist tradition. For Chinese traditions of Daoist examinations see Shin-yi Chao, "Daoist Examinations and Daoist Schools during the Northern Song Dynasty", *Journal of Chinese Religions* 31, no. 1 (2003).

44 Sem Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas. The Politics of Buddhism During the Koryŏ Dynasty (918–1392)* (Cambridge Mass. 2008), p. 183.

45 See James Huntley Grayson, *Korea – A Religious History. Revised Edition* (New York 2002), pp. 120–123. For the ideological foundations of the clash of two teachings see Charles A. Muller, *Korea's Great Buddhist-Confucian Debate. The Treaties of Chong Tojon (Sambong) and Hamho Tuktong (Kihwa)* (Honolulu 2021).

46 For some features of dynasty annals referring to Buddhism see Sung-Eun Thomas Kim, "Silencing the Culture of Chosŏn Buddhism: The Ideology of Exclusion of the Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok", *Journal of Korean Studies* 24, no. 2 (2019), pp. 289–313.

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study, the purpose of the evaluation procedure was simply to curb or eliminate as many candidates as possible.

Another integral part of the state examination system were the military service examinations (*mu'gwa* 武科). The system and its functions are well described[47] and there is plenty of evidence showing their practice, ranging from legal provisions to rosters of successful graduates or ornate paintings of the examinations. Yet the official military examinations were only one part of knowledge and skill assessment used in the Chosŏn armed forces. Since military readiness had to be evaluated continuously and military examinations only assessed candidates for high-ranking posts, there were a number of knowledge evaluation strategies employed on a day-to-day basis and targeted at the lower echelons of the army. Felix Siegmund's study about assessment and evaluation of military skills and knowledge in Chosŏn Korea addresses a number of related questions: How where military skills assessed at different levels? How did the examination of troops, as individuals and as a unit, work? What did they mean in practice? How did candidates prepare for such examinations?

The study presents some aspects of skill and knowledge assessment as they appear in manuals and other sources from Chosŏn, mostly in the 17th and 18th century. These include the forms of inspection, formal and informal examination of practical skills and theoretical knowledge. Evaluations of combat readiness could take the form of competitions in maneuvers, quasi-sport matches, etc. Important cases of military skill assessment were the inspection of recruits, archery competitions,[48] other weapon skill matches, etc. In the field of theoretical knowledge, the subjects of such tests were knowledge of military texts, principles of drill procedures, knowledge of disciplinary and organizational principles, etc. The results of such examinations affected the career of military personnel and was also an

47 See Eugene Y. Park, *Between Dreams and Reality. The Military Examination in Late Chosŏn Korea, 1600–1894* (Cambridge Mass. 2007).

48 An interesting twist in the significance of the same activity in a different cultural context can be found in the case of archery competitions. While in the military these were seen as practical training and simple competition, the Chosŏn literati and Confucian scholars in general stressed the usefulness of archery as an essentially non-competitive exercise in self-cultivation, as is well illustrated in *Lunyu*: "The superior man has nothing to compete for. But if he must compete, he does it in an archery match, wherein he ascends to his position, bowing in deference. Descending, one drinks the ritual cup" and *Liji* 46.2: "In archery we have something like the way of the superior man. When the archer misses the center of the target, he turns round and seeks for the cause of his failure in himself." For details on the role of archery within the Confucian tradition see Thomas H.C. Lee, "Archery Ranges in the Educational Tradition of Confucian Academies in China", in *Confucian Academies in East Asia*, p. 229. This interesting blend of military and Confucian views towards archery is visible in the treatment of literati from the northern provinces of Chosŏn, see Sun Joo Kim, *Voice from the North. Resurrecting Regional Identity Through the Life and Work of Yi Sihang (1672–1736)* (Stanford 2013), pp. 101–102; and also Jung Min, "The Shadow of Anonymity. The Depiction of Northerners in Eighteenth-Century 'Hearsay Accounts' (*kimun*)", in *The Northern Region of Korea. History, Identity, and Culture*, ed. Sun Joo Kim (Seattle 2010), pp. 93–115.

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important factor in social relations. Recognized military skill was a source of prestige and thus of social power and a means of social differentiation.

Informal Evaluations of Knowledge

Knowledge evaluation not always has to be implemented as a formal procedure like examinations nor is it necessarily associated with processes of selection or exclusion. In contrast to the top-down hierarchies present in the state examinations or their parallels on lower levels, we find many examples where the testing of knowledge was conducted on a peer-to-peer level. Barbara Wall's study on abbreviated storytelling as a method of knowledge evaluation focuses on the encoding and decoding of the famous Chinese novel *The Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji* 西遊記) in the seventeenth century and today. Grasping a literary allusion, correctly responding to a verse, or decoding the central motif of a literary work are some standard features within exchanges about literature. Abbreviated storytelling, in this sense, means the use of references to activate story worlds, memories, or family narratives and could be taken as an effective tool for displaying knowledge or awareness of literary motifs, stories, or narratives. In many cases there is a certain amount of pressure on participants of such communication because as Barbara Wall argues, if recipients are able to decode a story they become included in the knowing audience, or "in-group." However, if their literary knowledge is insufficient, they cannot crack the code and belong to the "out-group." On the other hand, abbreviated storytelling, in its many forms, displays strong ludic aspects. Individual readers' enjoyment of properly detecting an allusion in the text or fellow literati competing in decoding literary riddles are good examples for informal and entertaining ways of knowledge evaluation. Since this phenomenon is common in both premodern and modern times, Barbara Wall explores two clusters that are related to *The Journey to the West*, one of the most popular story worlds in East Asia. The first cluster comes from the beginning of the seventeenth century when a group of Korean scholars around Yu Mongin 柳夢寅 (1559–1623) first collectively decoded a painting as an allusion to *The Journey to the West* and then encoded *The Journey to the West* again in their inscriptions on the painting. The painting in question was one piece from the Ming painting collection *Gushi huapu* 顧氏畫譜 (Mr. Gu's Painting Manual, 1603), which depicts a monkey (or more precisely Sun Wukong). The second cluster focuses on three more recent examples that each encode the "jump out of Buddha's palm" scene from *The Journey to the West* to initialize its story world. These three latter examples include the short story "Tubŏntchae sangbong" (Second Meeting, 1955) by the North Korean novelist Han Ungbin, the novel *Pimyŏng ŭl ch'ajasŏ* (In Search of an Inscription) by the South Korean novelist Pok Kŏil, and the seventh episode of the South Korean TV series *Ssŭlssŭlhago ch'allanhasin – Tokkaebi* (Guardian: The Lonely and Great God, 2016–2017). The seventeenth-century poetry genre can certainly be seen as a form of competition between fellow literati to display their literary knowledge and shares

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many commonalities with modern writers from both Korean states,[49] who in their works encoded allusions to the same classical story. Barbara Wall's contribution on abbreviated storytelling as a way to evaluate literary knowledge indicates how widespread this practice was among Chosŏn literati and also shows how universal it is among all literary audiences.

While we can say that a lot of similarities existed between Buddhist and Confucian primary education, the advanced level of the Chosŏn Buddhist education and praxis exhibited features which were very far removed from conventional perceptions of knowledge evaluation as a simple quantitative or qualitative measurement. Thomas Kim's study is concerned with strategies in the Korean Buddhist tradition to test enlightenment or progress in the process of attaining Buddhahood – knowledge that by definition is impossible to be measured or evaluated. The study focuses on *kanhua chan* 看話禪 (kr. *kanhwa sŏn*), a technique of meditation on a "critical phrase" or "keyword", which since the twelfth century became a dominant technique in Korean Buddhist praxis. *Kanhwa sŏn* was not only a form of meditation practice for the purpose of inciting and bringing the practitioners mind to awakening, but also a form of evaluating the state of a student's mind to determine how far or close they were from enlightenment. Dialogues over "public cases" (*kong'an* 公案) between master and disciple or the composition of poetry were considered effective means of testing the knowledge of Buddhist adepts, or rather, their freedom from conventional knowledge.

State education in Chosŏn Korea solely focused on men. However, it would be an exaggeration to say that the education of women was ignored since efforts to enforce Confucian norms on their behavior were imposed through both legal measures and education. There are a substantial number of works that constitute the unofficial Confucian curriculum for women, including Queen Sohye's 昭惠王后 (1437–1504) *Naehun* 內訓 (Instructions for the Inner Chambers), Ch'oe Sejin's 崔世診 (1473–1542) *Yŏhun ŏnhae* 女訓諺解 (Vernacular Explication of Instructions for Women), Song Siyŏl's 宋時烈 (1607–1689) *Kyenyŏsyŏ* (戒女書, Letter of Admonition to My Daughter) or Yi Tŏksu's 李德壽 (1673–1744) *Yŏsasŏ ŏnhae* 女四書諺解 (Vernacular Explication of Four Books for Women) or the *Yŏsasŏ* 女四書 (Four

49 In spite of the highly selective approach of the North Korean regime toward literature, *The Journey to the West* has never been excluded from the North Korean literary canon and the story has been published, commented upon and was disseminated on various levels of both popular and academic discourse. Besides the translation of the work by Pak Kyŏngnam published by Munye ch'ulp'ansa in 1991, see Pak Kyŏngman (trans.) *Sŏyugi* (P'yŏngyang 1991), we may also mention Sun Wukong's story as published in the children literature journal *Adong munhak* or the full-fledged academic study in the journal of the Academy of Sciences, see "Son Okong", *Adong munhak* no. 4. (2006), and O Myŏngsu, "Chungguk changhoech'e hwansang sosŏl 'Sŏyugi' e ssŭin hwansang ŭi t'ŭkching e taehayŏ", *Sahoe kwahagwŏn hakpo*, no. 1 (2021): pp. 48–49; the same can be said about other classical Chinese novels, like for example the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義), which has been published both in 1961 and 1989. See Pak T'aewŏn (trans.), *Samguk yŏnŭi* 1–6 (P'yŏngyang 1959–1964); and Pak T'aewŏn (trans.), *Samguk yŏnŭi* 1–4 (P'yŏngyang 1989–1991).

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Books for Women) itself. And while there was certainly a number of women well versed in the Confucian canon for women, we only have a minimum of direct evidence related to the question of how their knowledge of the curriculum was tested and evaluated. A recurring pattern among educated women is that they often received education together with their male siblings in a private setting, which allowed the dissemination of 'male' knowledge to female family members. This is well attested by the biography of one of the most famous Chosŏn poets, Hŏ Nansŏrhon 許蘭雪軒 (1563–1589), who was the daughter of scholar and statesman Hŏ Yŏp 許曄 (1517–1580) and younger sister of famous writer Hŏ Kyun 許筠 (1569–1618). Another example of this pattern can be seen from the life of one of the few female Confucian thinkers of the same period, Im Yunjidang 任允摯堂 (1721–1793), who was the sister of famous philosopher Im Sŏngju 任聖周 (1711–1788). The available sources and the apparent high level of education among elite women stand in stark contrast to the dire situation of women in lower social strata. Knowledge that was supposed to be mastered, at least by some of them, included techniques of handicrafts, the complex and essential problems of food cooking and preservation (as attested by numerous cookbooks and household manuals), and specific female medical knowledge related especially to pregnancy and childbirth. In spite of the bulk of extant material, again, there is a lack of documents recording any formal or informal evaluation of such knowledge.

Nevertheless, it is clear that besides praises for chastity, as defined by Confucian norms, an educated woman was a source of fascination for Confucian literati which can be seen in the number of anecdotes written about kisaeng female entertainers. Although most of these stories are fictitious, we may state that the figure of a woman with refined intellectual and creative skills played a frequent part in Chosŏn literary discourse. In her study, Miriam Löwensteinová analyzes the various forms of literary skill testing in Chosŏn novels and narratives. The fictional space of the *kodae sosŏl* 古代小說 (classical novel) genre gave female protagonists much more agency than they could expect in their real lives, as well as a higher level of literary knowledge than expected by patriarchal society. Unlike elite Chosŏn women, who were constrained to the inner parts of the household, the female heroines of popular novels freely communicated with potential partners, composed poems or songs, and gained recognition for their skills and love from their future partners. Evaluation of female literary skills or the testing of either female or male protagonists as the plot of popular novels presents a fascinating type of imagined knowledge: knowledge that seldom had been real, but that the readers of novels wished it could be.

Conclusions

The present volume indicates both strengths and problematic points in the study of evaluation processes of knowledge in premodern Korea. On one hand, it offers small nuanced and plastic pictures of the state and circumstances surrounding knowledge transfer on various levels. On the other hand, due to many factors, but above all an inherent lack of documentation, it has no choice but to leave us with

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only more questions. Nevertheless, focus on evaluation practices and strategies proves fruitful in bridging the gap between prescribed canon and demanded level of knowledge through documented cases of individuals who either commanded or lacked this knowledge. The ambiguous and simultaneously often dichotomic nature of the evaluation process gives equal space to both success and failure. Our volume was motivated, not only by the question of what people in Chosŏn Korea knew, but also what they did not know. It was this motivation which led the contributors of the volume to climb down the ladder of success and focus on scholars who were not the winners of the state examinations, on women, soldiers, or Buddhist monks. The perspective from below also reveals a large volume of materials that rarely has been taken into account within the field of the history of ideas, most notably the enormous role of the medium of poetry.

Another aspect of going beyond elite and state perspectives is a focus on alternative voices; in spite of the natural existence of knowledge evaluation, not all of its forms were welcomed by the involved subjects. Several studies in this volume discuss resistance against or critiques of imposed examinations and explore the Janus-faced nature of the evaluation process. State rhetoric about the search for the best talents is counterbalanced by criticism of the state examination's ruthless competition, and the Buddhist monk examinations imposed by the Chosŏn state should be seen as an attempt to eliminate and suppress the Sangha community.

Much like the evaluation of knowledge which brings only a snapshot of the *hic et nunc* knowledge constellation, the present volume is only a cursory picture of various strategies, participants, or results of the evaluation of knowledge in premodern Korea. With that in mind, we hope it will inspire further studies in the field which will make our knowledge about Korean and East Asian epistemic processes in general more complete.

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Learning for Oneself: Evaluation of Knowledge in Korean Confucian Academies

Vladimír Glomb

Introduction

How Confucian were the state civil service examinations? It is generally assumed that the Chinese examination system was shaped, at least since Learning of the Way "became mainstream"[1], during the late Song, Yuan, and early Ming in accordance with the ideals and wishes of the Confucian community. Hilde De Weerdt vividly described the process of "negotiation over the content" of state examination standards in imperial China.[2] Given the fact that it was this form of the literati knowledge evaluation that was emulated by the Chosŏn state, it has been generally assumed that a similar stable symbiotic relation between the examination system and Korean Confucian community existed. While it is true that the Chosŏn state examination system to a large degree mirrored the Learning of the Way ideology, Korean literati also expressed a broad range of negative views and critiques about the examinations. Their opposition was not always based on dissenting political views or accusations of corruption, which for many scholars was a reason to shun the examinations, but was also particularly focused on the competitive nature of the state examinations. The ruthless elimination of candidates was not very compatible with Confucian notions about the educational process and the routinized testing of textual knowledge or mnemonic skills gave little to no space for debates on self-cultivation and the moral qualities of candidates.

While there were many efforts to improve the state examination system (and state education in general)[3], an institutional formulation of an alternative system for knowledge transfer and evaluation came only with the nascent of Confucian academies during the middle and late Chosŏn period. From their very beginning, Korean Confucian academies were designed as an answer to the perceived evils of state education and presented a truly Confucian alternative to both state schools and the examination system. Thanks to the academies, Korean scholars of the Learning of the Way for the first time were given a chance to design their own

1 Benjamin Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge Mass. 2013), pp. 11–292.

2 Hilde De Weerdt, *Competition Over Content. Negotiating Standards: Negotiating Standards for the Civil Service Examinations in Imperial China (1127–1279)* (Cambridge Mass. 2007).

3 An overview of these efforts is offered by James B. Palais, *Confucian statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle 1996), pp. 122–207.

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curricula and examination systems which would reflect the demands of the Confucian doctrine without any compromises. The new institutions also gave rise to innovative strategies and ways of knowledge evaluation, this time fully under the aegis of the ideals of the Learning of the Way.

Academies and State Examinations

From the onset of the sixteenth century, the relation between the state examinations and Confucian academies was complicated. Many scholars within the academy movement considered the competitive nature of state examinations incompatible with the lofty pursuit of the Learning of the Way and strived to base the academy curriculum on more idealistic foundations. On the other hand, state examinations were the alpha and omega of every literati's career and it was difficult to ignore their role in an individual scholar's rise to official posts and economic benefits guaranteeing the survival of his family and even his whole lineage. This dilemma is well documented in the regulations of the first academies, which strove to delineate borders between the realm of dedicated Confucian studies and the mundane area of the state examinations. T'oegye Yi Hwang 退溪 李滉 (1501–1570) in his rules for the Isan Academy 伊山書院 stressed that "concerning the state examination studies one also cannot but make a certain effort to gain a broad insight and comprehend them, but one should understand the proper order of inner and outer, beginning and end, light and important or slow and urgent"[4], acknowledging their importance while also hinting that academy studies are a different type of study. Another influential figure of the first academies Yulgok Yi I 栗谷 李珥 (1536–1584) took a stricter approach and in his Ŭnbyŏng Study Hall Regulations (*Ŭnbyŏng chŏngsa hakkyu* 隱屏精舍學規) stipulated that "if somebody wants to take study for state examinations, he should definitely prepare somewhere else."[5]

The rationale for special treatment of state examinations candidates in the academies was described by Han'gang Chŏng Ku 寒岡 鄭逑 (1543–1620), who in his prescriptions for academy studies argued that "Scholars who have entered this academy cannot avoid matters of state examinations, but besides state examinations there also exists what ancient people called learning for oneself."[6] Academy scholars appropriated Confucius' saying that "ancient scholars studied for themselves, current scholars study for others"[7] as their manifesto, refusing to study in order to impress an audience (or more precisely state examiners) and focus solely on one's own cultivation. "To study for oneself (chin. *weiji*, kor. *wigi* 爲己)", free

4 *T'oegye chip* 41:51a.
5 *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* 15:45a.
6 *Han'gang sŏnsaeng sokchip* 4:3b–4a.
7 *Lunyu* 14:24. See the entry "Learning for oneself", in *Chinese Philosophy on Teaching and Learning: Xueji in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Xu Di and Hunter McEwan (Albany 2016), pp. 89–91. For late Song, Yuan, Ming and early Qing definitions of the concept see Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Learning for One's Self. Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York 1991).

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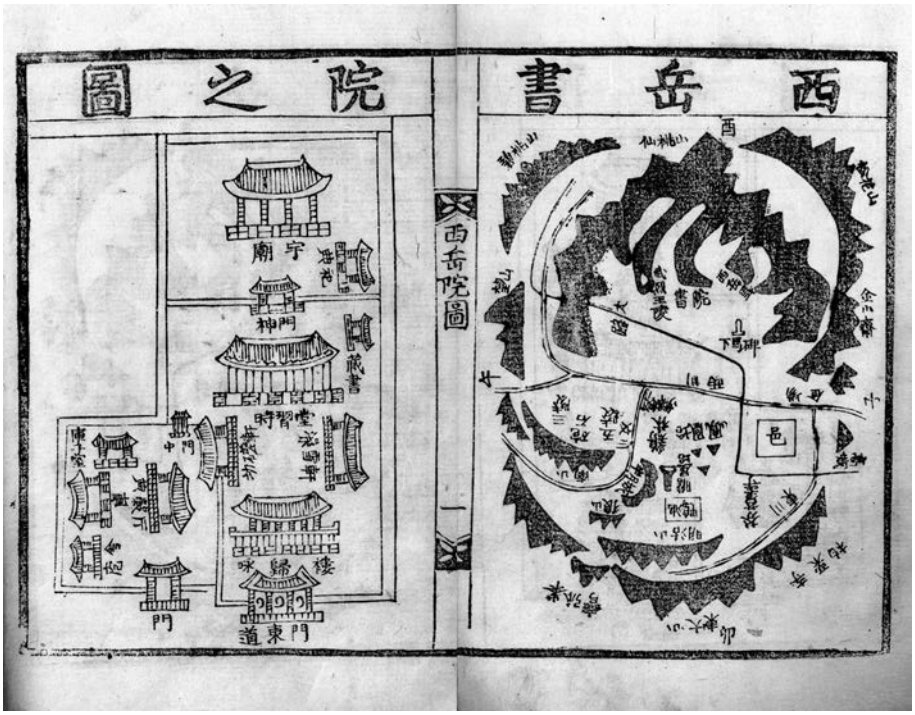

Fig. 1&2: Map of Sŏak Academy 西岳書院 located close to the city of Kyŏngju as taken from the *Sŏakchi* 西岳志 (*Records of Sŏak*)

of pursuit of fame and profit, became a common slogan depicting an opposition between academy studies and state examinations.[8]

Academies strove to pursue a different type of study, but the state examinations were a constant in a literati's life which was difficult to ignore and an outright ban of preparations for them was not feasible. Many academies slowly accepted this fact and provided more subtle regulations to control preparations for the state examinations within academy compounds. Chŏng Ku's note that "concerning materials for state examinations, even students cannot avoid to read them with their spare energy, these are not allowed to enter their reading list for the [academy] exams"[9] shows that this type of study was more or less tolerated if it did not interfere with the academy curriculum. Some academies attempted to separate both types of studies either by isolating candidates of state examinations from other academy members, or by scheduling alternating times for both activities. The underlying

8 See Pak Chŏngbae, "Hakkyu rŭl t'onghaesŏ pon Chosŏn sidae ŭi sŏwŏn kanghoe", *Han'guk kyoyuk sahak* 19, no.2 (2009), pp. 45–52.

9 *Han'gang sŏnsaeng sokchip* 4:18b–19a.

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motive was a fear that the state examination preparation agenda could replace the academy curriculum and lead any "learning for oneself" astray. Namgye Pak Sech'ae 南溪 朴世采 (1631–1695) warned against this danger in his Regulations of Munhoe Academy (*Munhoe sŏwŏn wŏn'gyu* 文會書院院規) stating that:

> The reason why former worthies certainly wanted to establish academies separate from local schools was in fact because preparing for state examinations in local schools is difficult and students are not able to focus solely on lectures and study. But now when an academy is established it is often following this old habit of pursuing state examinations so there are many schools, which at the end are not a place of lectures and study and the original intention of the academy is obliterated. There should be a separate dormitory for students who engage in state examination preparation (If it is not possible to establish a separate dormitory, let them reside in the western dormitory).[10]

Pak Sech'ae's alarm about this matter was not unsubstantiated; focusing only on the state examinations would deprive academies not only of their purpose but also of students, who could easily prepare somewhere else, either in state schools or in the often chosen quietness of Buddhist monasteries. This problem was also discussed by T'aektang Yi Sik 澤堂 李植 (1584–1647) who argued that in spite of all their problems, Confucian academies were always the better option to pursue any type of true Confucian study. In a private letter he urged his own son to follow this way and explained the position of academies within the triangle of state examinations, private study, and the Learning of the Way.

> Now you two, my nephew and my child, want to stay in a temple and devote yourself to study but I have urged you to go to Tobong Academy. My intention is by no means accidental. The state, through the state examinations, models sons of scholars and it is not that by which you progress to the affairs of the Way. But in the practice of the state examinations the Way is contained. These are just two divided branches of whether you are motivated for it or not. The intention of the state was never to have it like two ways to follow. It is just so that if you do not want to reside in an academy and you must reside in a temple it is exactly the beginning of the difference between respectful effort and laziness. If all students would follow my words and enter academies, they could properly take a small step forward and truly devote themselves to study. Thus, it could be possible to gradually expel the habit of detesting academies and enjoying mountain monasteries and everybody could gain something.[11]

10 *Namgye chip* 65:10a.
11 *T'aektang chip* 14:8a.

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The above case shows that academies relatively early on had already developed a *modus vivendi* tolerating state examination studies within their compounds, while keeping their own education goals. This allowed students to learn for the others, i.e. state examinations, while still being aware of the true goal of learning for oneself. On a practical level many academies devised a system of alternating between times, when students studied in the academy and when they prepared for the state examinations. The program of a 1730 study stay (*kŏjae chŏlmok* 居齋節目) in Sosu Academy 紹修書院 argued that "state examination study is a matter at second or third place for a student"[12] but nevertheless urged academy authorities to pay attention in what years state examinations were to be held and adjust the study plan accordingly.

Despite these modifications, it is clear that Confucian academies were consciously designed as an alternative to the state examinations system. Even when their students and teachers participated in official competitions, their intentions were, at least during a stay in an academy, different. Academy authorities never forgot to stress that any compromise with the state examination system was made out of necessity to allow students worldly success. Even the flexible Sosu Academy clearly stated in its 1790 program for students that "state examinations are not a real study, but since in common customs these are venerated, you cannot but have a combined command of them too."[13]

Moral Education

Academies, a much younger institution than the state examinations, were established by their founders to remedy some of the most serious flaws of the state system. The most debated of these flaws was the absence of proper scrutiny on character and moral values of students during the state examination. The persistent argument that it is not possible to determine the true qualities of candidates via the means of a purely mechanical examination performed in a very short period of time already appeared among Chosŏn literati before the founding of the first academies. Probably the most famous case in this debate was an attempt to establish a special recommendation system that would open the way to officialdom for scholars, who for various reasons shunned the examination system. Reform-minded scholars led by Cho Kwangjo 趙光祖 (1482–1519) proposed this change in 1519 and for a brief time, before their purge in the same year, succeeded in its implementation. As Ch'oe Yŏng-ho comments, Cho Kwangjo and his group pointed "to the

12 See Yŏngnam munhŏn yŏn'guso (ed.), *Sosu sŏwŏn chi* (Yŏngju 2007), p. 414. The Sosu Academy rules for a study stay dated to 1727 also stressed that meeting of students for study or poetry compositions should not be interrupted even in year when state examinations are held, and students should meet whenever time and agriculture affairs allow it. See ibid, p. 410. All documents of the Sosu Academy are quoted according the critical edition of the *Sosu sŏwŏn chi* 紹修書院誌 (Records of Sosu Academy). Page numbers indicate the designated place of the quote within the transcribed original text.

13 See ibid., p. 422 for details on relation between academy activities and state examinations.

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presumed failure to recruit the men of proven virtue and mature classical scholarship," and "argued that it was not possible to determine the quality of candidates by one brief examination."[14] The founding of the first academies, which followed merely decades after Cho Kwangjo's attempt, addressed the same dilemma.

The underlying idea of academy education was an ancient concept, highlighted by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), based on the proper balance between moral self-cultivation personified by the slogan "honouring virtuous nature" and intellectual achievements based on "constant inquiry and study" (尊德性而道問學, *Zhongyong* XXVII.6). The state examination focused only on the second part, ignoring the component of self-cultivation, which was necessary to form the moral backbone for any serious study.[15] Yulgok described the importance of both methods in a letter to students of his Ŭnbyŏng Study Hall, the later Sohyŏn Academy 紹賢書院.

> When there are no activities to engage, the quiet sitting and purifying of your mind are activities of honoring the virtuous nature. When there are activities to engage, discussing and illuminating what is wrong and what is right is the activity of pursuing the path of inquiry and study. These two things are tasks for your whole life and you cannot miss any of them. If you are sincerely able to make your intentions great and your mind earnest, and when you find the right moment to put it into practice, then everything you do for the whole day will be according to the principles of the Way. Even when you prepare for the state examinations (it is like this). You can as well carry water or collect firewood; each of these things has its subtle use and application. But if you do it without the real and genuine mind, you can do it for the whole day and it will be only a vulgar and ordinary activity.[16]

All academies, with a major or minor success, strove to remold young students into full-fledged devoted members of the Learning of the Way fellowship.[17] The component of moral education, allegedly contrasting the mechanical textual learning of the state examinations, to a large degree determined the form and content of academy education. The very first step in the academy curriculum shows that un-

14 Ch'oe Yŏng-ho, *The Civil Examinations and the Social Structure in Early Yi Dynasty Korea, 1392–1600* (Seoul 1987), p. 69.

15 The way in which these two terms, together with other fundamentals of the Confucian doctrine and "vices of state examinations" (科擧之害), were explained to academy students is well documented in Pak Sech'ae's Lecture in Munhoe Academy (*Munhoe sŏwŏn kangŭi* 文會書院講議) delivered in 1682, see *Namgye chip* 65:23a–24b.

16 *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* 15:48b.

17 It is necessary to note that Chosŏn scholars participating in the academy movement really strove to revive the original spirit of the Learning of the Way fellowship of their Song time models, which is well described by Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi's Ascendancy* (Honolulu 1992). Although on a practical level there were only few similarities between Song and Chosŏn academies, Korean scholars nevertheless felt a strong bond to their Chinese predecessors represented by Zhu Xi and his White Deer Grotto Academy, see Martin Gehlmann, "Passing on the Torch of Learning: The White Deer Grotto Academy in Transfer Between China and Korea" (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2020).

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like the preconditions of the state examinations which required Chosŏn students to only prove their noble status,[18] academies were supposed to only value moral qualities and talent. Even though these ideals were not always put into practice, many academy rules insisted that students should be admitted regardless of their origin. The Korean civil service examinations system was plagued by social and even regional discrimination,[19] but academy students were supposed to be admitted based on their determination and character. Ŭnbyŏng Study Hall provides a vivid picture of such enrollment practice:

> Concerning the rules for admission to the academy dormitory, there shall be no discussion as to whether a person is of a literati family, or belongs to any category of the common people. Only those harboring the intention to study could be admitted. Those who are already in the academy may scrutinize and discuss whether a new candidate could enter the academy. Only after that may a candidate be admitted. If there are candidates who would wish to enter, but have, in their past, acted contrary to propriety, or have been recalcitrant, let them first change their errors and improve by themselves. When we have completely observed [the candidate's] behavior and have definitively determined that he has improved his behavior, only after such a point will the candidate be allowed to enter. If someone, who we have never met before wishes to be admitted, temporally place him in the close village (or in the Dormitory of Fostering Correct Behavior) or in a mountain monastery, where you can visit him and inquire after his studies; observe his aspirations and interests or habits so you would know whether he is an acceptable person. Only after that will he be admitted.[20]

The same spirit can be seen in the rules of Munhoe Academy, which explicitly allowed – possibly the most unjust victims of state examination prejudice – secondary sons of yangban families to join.[21]

> Concerning the rule of scholar selection, it is not allowed to discuss neither their age nor their high or low origin (by high origin are called offspring of literati families and by low origin are meant people like students from local school and secondary sons). Once students established their intention to study and their name and conduct are without blemish, they are allowed to enter the academy.[22]

18 See Yi Sŏngmu, *Han'guk ŭi kwagŏ chedo* (Seoul 2000), pp. 187–202

19 See Jang Yoo-seung, "Regional Identities of Northern Literati: A Comparative Study of P'yŏngan and Hamgyŏng Provinces", in *The Northern Region of Korea. History, Identity and Culture*, ed. Sun Joo Kim (Seattle 2010), pp. 62–92.

20 *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* 15:43b

21 See Martina Deuchler, "'Heaven Does Not Discriminate.' A Study of Secondary Sons in Chosŏn Korea", *Journal of Korean Studies* 6 (1988–89), pp. 121–163.

22 *Namgye chip* 65:6b–7a.

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Confucian academies had a strong egalitarian spirit, respecting only those hierarchies compatible with Confucian virtues. Remarkable features of this autonomy were tendencies to regulate student communities without interference of local officials, by collective decision making or arranging academy hierarchies according to age and not rank or wealth.

Discipline and Cultivation

Moral cultivation was introduced to students from the very beginning on a more instrumental level of proper Confucian decorum. Academy regulations devoted enormous attention to the matters of proper behavior, hygiene, or speech of students, which were considered to be the first step in proper moral education. Academy curricula provided detailed itineraries for students, not only instructing them on how to keep their sheets and comb their hair, but also on how to walk or behave to each other. Academy rules were appended with numerous paragraphs on how to both discipline and cultivate young students. The design of the academies, which isolated young students from the outside world, offered a unique opportunity to scholars of the Learning of the Way to put into practice a comprehensive strategy on how to remold young boys into disciplined students. Yulgok's plan was to devise a daily routine, which would focus on minute details of student behavior and allow for no distraction from their study efforts.

> Every morning students get up at daybreak and put their bed and sheets in proper order. Young students take brooms and sweep the rooms. Dormitory attendants are ordered to sweep the yard. Students wash, make their hair, and put their dress in order. When the day is bright, students divide into two lines at the east and west side of the yard according to their age. Facing each other, they mutually bow. After the rites are concluded, students return to study rooms.
>
> In standard situations students must always have their dress, cap, and belt neat and tidy, kneel upright and respectfully with clasped hands as if facing an older or respectable person. They cannot wear less formal clothes to make themselves comfortable. (They must wear straight collar robes). No beautiful or luxurious clothes are allowed either. All instruments or necessities like the table, books, brush, or ink stone must be in proper order at their place. There must be no chaos or disorder or leaving them not in a proper order. Handwriting must be also in model script. It is also forbidden to write on walls or windows.
>
> Comfortable places must be yielded to older people and one must never choose what is comfortable for him. If anyone older more than ten years enters or leaves, younger students must stand up.

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> During meals, older and younger sit according to their age. Concerning food or drinks, one cannot be picky. Always bear in mind that [a gentleman] in his food does not seek to gratify his appetite.[23]
>
> When reading, students must kneel upright and respectfully with clasped hands, give their whole mind, and direct their intention, exert themselves to fully grasp the meaning and the right lesson. Students should not look at each other and engage in idle talks.
>
> In speech, one must be cautious and serious. If it is not about texts or rituals, one should not speak about it. One should not converse about obscene or dirty things, rebellious, mysterious or strange affairs, etc.[24] One should not chat about other people's mistakes or wrongs. One should not chat about government affairs. One should not talk about achievements or failures of local officials.[25]

Two paragraphs from the Munhoe Academy Regulations show that the stress on proper decorum and discipline was a common feature of all Korean academies.

> Always by the daybreak students wake up and make order in their sleeping place. The young ones sprinkle and sweep the room. (Personnel of the academy are tasked to clean the academy court.) After they wash and comb their hair they go to the court, bow to each other, and return to their rooms.
>
> The living place must be in the proper order, clothes (including headwear), cap and belt must be straight, and you should sit respectfully as if facing divine beings. If there is a comfortable and favorite place, you should yield it to the older colleagues. If there is anything to do, you stand up or walk slowly with small careful steps. If everything is done orderly, there will be the proper etiquette.
>
> (If anybody older by more than ten years enters or leaves, younger students must stand up.) Generally, it is forbidden to turn one's head and look around, engage in idle talks, and go outside looking for something because it obstructs the study effort.[26]

23 See *Lunyu* 1:14 "The Master said, He who aims to be a man of complete virtue in his food does not seek to gratify his appetite…"

24 An allusion to *Lunyu* 7:21. In the rules for his study hall Yulgok quotes Confucius directly, see *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* 15:45a. It is necessary to note that concerning student discipline both texts are almost identical, with Ŭnbyŏng Study Hall Regulations being slightly more detailed. For a comparison of both texts see Vladimir Glomb, "Shrines, Sceneries, and Granary: The Constitutive Elements of the Confucian Academy in 16th-Century Korea", in *Confucian Academies in East Asia*, eds. Vladimir Glomb, Eun-Jeung Lee et al. (Leiden 2020), pp. 319–358.

25 *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* 15:49b–50b.

26 *Namgye chip* 65:8a.

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These manners and ideals were certainly not new and all Chosŏn literati would agree upon them. Yulgok himself preached the same discipline, almost word for word, in his popular textbook *Kyŏngmong yogyŏl* 擊蒙要訣 (Important Methods of Eliminating Youthful Ignorance)[27] and there was no difference between general Confucian rules and the regulations of the academies. Yet academies for the first time gave teachers the possibility to isolate students and subject them to a complex program covering their whole day. Repeated bans against women entering academy premises[28] and a cordon sanitaire against heterodox teaching, alcohol (or later tobacco), and practically against everything that could distract students indicate that academy authorities were determined to create an environment where students could pursue and put into practice the Learning of the Way ideals.

True scholarship was supposed to be inseparable from moral qualities and the behavior of students and academy authorities focused on the progress of students in this field, as much as on discussions of the classics and standard textual studies. Discipline and education of academy students was a rather diverse process, since this nominal category included both young unruly students residing permanently in the academy as well as seasoned scholars who occasionally gathered at the academies for study stays. Yet, the ideals of the Confucian community remained binding for them all. Moral advancement of students was necessarily paired with the issue of discipline, and while academy authorities displayed much patience and stressed communication among community members, they never hesitated to also take repressive steps. The most common punishment for students was to be excluded from lectures, while the most severe penalty was expulsion from the academy community, as we can see in a simple statement of the Isan Academy Regulations that if any student "does not follow proper rules, such student must be discussed by the collective in the academy and expelled."[29] In the same way, Munhoe Academy stipulated punishments for students.

> Those who are violating proper manners and are lazy and indolent are to be disciplined according to the gravity of their wrongdoing. They could be expelled from their seat or stricken from the academy roster. Anything involving the loosening of manners or harmful conduct must be discussed with full gravity.[30]

27 For an extensive commentary on self-cultivation and discipline chapters in *Kyŏngmong yogyŏl* see Isabelle Sancho, *Principes essentiels pour éduquer les jeunes gens* (Paris 2011).

28 The stereotypical phrase "Women are not allowed to enter the gate of the academy" first appeared in T'oegye rules for Isan Academy and is repeated in the majority of influential academy regulations, including Munhoe Academy Regulations and Chaun Academy Regulations (*Chaun sŏwŏn wŏn'gyu* 紫雲書院院規) by Pak Sech'ae or Sŏksil Academy Study Regluations (*Sŏksil sŏwŏn hakkyu* 石室書院學規) by Kim Wŏnhaeng 金元行 (1703–1772).

29 *T'oegye chip* 41:51a.

30 *Namgye chip* 65:9a.

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This was a paradox reversal of the state examination strategy; while failure or success in state examinations was assessed by textual knowledge and not moral qualities, students in academies were predominantly disciplined or rewarded for their behavior, but not for their study results. This was a practical result of putting equal stress on moral cultivation and textual studies. Being a good Confucian scholar not always meant intellectual brilliance as moral qualities and upright behavior were *sine qua non*. Translated into practical terms, this led to a situation in which even students of only mediocre talent could study in the academies if they could fulfil the strict ritual requirements of the institution.

Moral advancement of students was a criterion that was difficult to measure. Academy authorities to a large degree relied on self-regulation mechanisms of the school community and trusted in the good influence of the academy collective. This approach is documented, for example, in the case of Munhŏn Academy 文憲書院 in Haeju, which prescribed that "friends must mutually exert toward harmony and peace, instruct each other about their mistakes, and mutually encourage in goodness."[31] However, the very same academy relied on a more systematic approach and stipulated that "on the first day of every month of the four seasons, supervisors assemble all students in the academy and lecture and discuss the academy rules. Achievements and failures of all students are inspected."[32] Regular evaluation of students' moral progression or regression gave origins to an elaborate method of tracing students behavior; the frequently quoted Ŭnbyŏng Study Hall Regulations describe the system with all its resulting consequences.

> Assistants keep records of the good and bad deeds of students. They inspect everything, what students are doing either in school or at home. Whether there is speech or behavior according to the principles or violating of school regulations, everything is recorded. At each new moon, these records are submitted to the master and elders. (If somebody violates the regulations, assistants thoroughly report it to the headmaster and supervisor and they jointly press for the honoring of rules. If the culprit does not repent, he is reported to the master. If he does repent and improve, his records are deleted and nothing is reported to the master.) The good ones are praised and encouraged, the bad ones are warned and instructed, but if at the end they do not accept the instructions, they are dismissed from the school.[33]

The custom of keeping records about student behavior became prevalent in many academies and despite the fact that very few examples of this fascinating type of record are extant,[34] it provides testimony to the attention attached to the moral education within academy compounds.

31 *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* 15:50a.
32 *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* 15:51a.
33 *Yulgok chŏnsŏ* 15:46a.
34 See Pak Hyŏnjun, "Chosŏn sidae sŏnakjŏk yŏn'gu", *Kyoyuk sahak yŏn'gu* 22 (2012), pp. 37–60.

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Confucian academies addressed the perceived lack of moral evaluation via a pronounced emphasis on student self-cultivation and behavior, which formed the backbone of academy education. Isolation in the academies from the outer world, bans of women entering, and strict discipline were taken as the preconditions for an ideal environment, where students could foster their adherence to Confucian ideals. This ideal was, however, rarely completely put into practice. Sustaining a permanent community of students in the academy was often beyond economic means of the institutions and during the late Chosŏn period most of the academies only organized short study stays for students or occasional lecture gatherings. Despite these later deviations from the academy ideal, Korean academies were a formidable practical critique to the state examinations system and demonstrated that the literati community was able to create an optimal balance between moral and intellectual education without any state guidance or interference.

Academy Curriculum and Examinations

In spite of their critique of state education and the civil service examination system, Korean academies followed the same curriculum of Confucian classics as their counterparts, the state schools.[35] This consisted of Zhu Xi's arrangement of the Four Classics and Five Books, supplemented by further introductory material, commentaries, historical sources, and writings of Zhu Xi himself and other Song masters. The early Isan Academy curriculum simply states that "when students study books, they should consider the Four Books and Five Classics as their base and the *Elementary Learning* and the *Family Rituals* should be their gate to them."[36] A later reading list of Munhoe Academy mentions similar books, only with more details concerning their specific categories.

> The state creates scholars by depending on the Four Books and Five Classics promulgated and bestowed upon us by the August Court. The *Elementary Learning* and the *Family Rituals* are also tested. These are indeed materials students should constantly study and practice. The rest of reading curriculum should be classics (like *Rites of Zhou*, *Yili* and the *Classic of Filial Piety*), books (like *Jinsilu*, *Xinjing* and *Xingli daquan*), histories (like the tree commentaries of *Chunqiu* and *Zizhi* [*Tongjian*] *gangmu*) and writings left by masters of the Luo and Min school (like *Complete writing of Brothers Cheng*, *Zhuzi daquan* or *Yulei*). Also, these all are the base and origin of the Learning of the Way and the springs and meadows of the [teaching on] human nature and principle and cannot be omitted as a subject of study and practice.[37]

35 For general features of the Chosŏn literati curriculum see Vladimir Glomb, "Reading the Classics Till Death: Yulgok Yi I and the Curriculum of Chosŏn Literati", *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* II.2 (2012), pp. 315–329.

36 *T'oegye chip* 41:51a.

37 *Namgye chip* 65:9a–b.

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The curriculum was studied repeatedly as indicated in the Sŏksil Academy Study Regulations, which prescribed that "first studied is the *Elementary Learning*, next is the *Great Learning* (together with *huowen* commentary), *Lunyu*, *Mencius*, *Zhongyong*, and then *Xinjing* and *Jinsilu* and later various classics. When finished, the round is started over again."[38]

Thanks to the bureaucratic routine of the academies, we have a very solid overview not only of their library holdings,[39] but also about the actual reading practices of the students. Extant records of book borrowing[40] enable us to document which books students actually used in their studies – a phenomena that on an individual student level is rarely documented outside of the academies. Library catalogues indicate, besides the above prescribed classics and commentaries, three large groups of publications that played an important role in the reading curriculum. The first were vernacular versions of classics (*ŏnhae* 諺解), which were rarely mentioned in adult literati writings but for young students played an important role. The second group were works on Korean scholars, usually those affiliated directly or via scholarly lineages with the academy. Besides the Confucian classics, the official reading curriculum only included a handful of works by Korean authors. On the practical level of lectures, there were intensive debates concerning Chosŏn thinkers and their writings. The third kind of publication massively present in academy libraries was poetry. This is somewhat puzzling because scholars of the Learning of the Way in many public statements discouraged poetic compositions. However, they drew the line not simply between Confucian classics and poetry, but rather between proper, serious poetry and frivolous poems, which distracted students and was produced only for momentary amusement. Poetry played an important role in academy education and already the oldest book catalogue of any Korean academy, the Catalogue of Paegundong Academy 白雲洞書院 (the later Sosu Academy), lists works of Du Mu 杜牧 (803–852) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819).[41] Even late Chosŏn Musŏng Academy 武城書院, which possessed only a few dozens of books, kept two volumes of Du Fu's poetry, five books containing Tang poems, and six volumes of selected *fu* poems.[42]

Well-stocked libraries attracted many students, but the main purpose of these collections was strictly to serve academy fellows in their studies of the Learning of the Way doctrine. Early academy rules were not specific on how student progress should be evaluated; in many cases students studied and transcribed the Classics

38 *Miho chip* 14:20b.

39 See Vladimír Glomb and Eun-Jeung Lee, "'NoBooks to Leave, No Women to Enter': Confucian Academies in Pre-Modern Korea and Their Book Collections", in *Collect and Preserve. Institutional Contexts of Epistemic Knowledge in Pre-modern Societies*, eds. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, Jochem Kahl et al. (Wiesbaden 2021), pp. 175–198.

40 Lee Byoung-Hoon, "Books and Book Culture in Oksan Academy", in *Confucian Academies in East Asia*, ed. Vladimir Glomb, Eun-Jeung Lee et al. (Leiden 2020), pp. 197–225.

41 *Chukkye chi*, Changsŏrok 4, Paegundong sŏwŏn changsŏ.

42 *Musŏng sŏwŏn chi* 1:34b–35a.

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and then engaged in dialogues with their master, who was more or less regularly visiting them or occasionally spent longer time at the academy. More elaborate rules of the later period stipulated regular lectures, which served as festive events to discuss and display student knowledge and progress.

> Every month by at the beginning and in the middle of the month, all students, properly dressed, go to the western shrine, open its gate and burn incenses (this must be done by the most senior of them), prostrate twice and then proceed to the eastern shrine where they perform rituals in the same way. (Even if it is not at the beginning and in the middle of the month, students who are leaving or coming must bow to the shrine too.) They come back and in the yard of the academy bow to each other. Afterwards they ascend to the lecture hall, where the seating order is decided. There they read Articles of the Learning of the White Deer Grotto Academy, *Hakkyo mobŏm* 學校模範 (Models for schools) (the same is valid for the academy rules) and the *Elementary Learning*, Four Books, *Jinsilu*, *Sŏnghak chibyo* 聖學輯要 (Compiled Essentials of the Sage's Learning), and other books as it is written on wooden boards hanging in the hall. They follow the fixed order and read one book after another and once they finish, they start again. They ask each other about difficult parts and guide and advise others.[43]

The most striking feature of these rules was their collegial and non-competitive nature. The purpose of examination sessions was not to eliminate students, but rather to help them understand the complicated issues of the Confucian doctrine. One of the perennial problems of academy education was the fact that masters who were intellectual authorities were not always present during the sessions. In such a case it was advised to record disputable points and archive them for later discussions. Munhoe Academy Regulations recommended to "select quick, clever and well writing men to make them assistants for the month and let them to record lectures, discussion, opinions and proper methods together with records of good and bad deeds for the later examinations."[44] Kim Wŏnhaeng 金元行 (1703–1772), an influential figure of the late Chosŏn academy renaissance, described the role of lecture and examinations records in an even more detailed way in the two paragraphs of his rules for academy lectures.

> Among academy students, select someone who has good writing skills and is good in keeping records. Make him the month's assistant and change every month. Always when there is a lecture gathering and both the director of the academy and the director of the lectures cannot attend the lecture, students discuss questions and answers on their own and when there are important matters related to principles and what is right, the monthly assistant is delegated to compose a complex circular letter and send these mate-

43 *Namgye chip* 65:7b–8a.
44 *Namgye chip* 65:7a–b.

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> rials to the directors. Together, the director of the academy and the director of the lectures together answer, and their answers are kept in the academy.
>
> If a student for some reason cannot be present at the gathering, he records unclear points in the chapters selected for the lecture of that month and submits them to the director of the academy and the director of the lectures. (Also, when there are answers he shows them to everybody and these are later stored in the academy.) Even those who participate in the lectures are allowed to prepare a list of disputable points beforehand, then wait until the lecture is concluded and discuss it within the gathering.[45]

Academy examinations significantly changed together with the expansion and transformation of the academy system. Later texts on academy examinations show details that had not yet been established during the first stage of the academy establishment, or at least were not explicitly articulated in a written way at that time.

Early academies were often founded by famous scholars, who in this way established a permanent base for their followers and disciples. As we can see from the correspondence of Yulgok, students residing in Ŭnbyŏng Study Hall belonged to a close circle of his disciples and were bound to their master through very personal ties. The growing number of academies caused the student communities to be more anonymous and much less enthusiastic than the first generation of academy students. Academy lectures and examinations became more formalized and introduced a series of measures on how to maintain standards of education within academy compounds. Free dialogue with the masters was supplemented by a grading system not dissimilar to that of the state examination system. The Sŏksil Academy 石室書院 regulations for lectures provide an insight to the academy's examination system, which kept many features of a collegial scholarly community but also put more stress on the competence of its students.

> Every month the lecture is fixed for the sixteenth day of the month. If there is any reason to cancel the lecture, academy authorities send a letter beforehand and inform all who wanted to participate in the lecture.
>
> When it comes to the lecture, paragraphs of a text are divided according to the number of participants and their sequence is also determined by lots (like "the first", "the second"). According to their draws they respond and read in order of their age. (If there is a surplus of people for a reduced number of chapters, it is not necessary that everybody reads and when a chapter is finished, the reading stops.)
>
> Students over thirty years read a text from the book, those younger recite the text with their backs turned to the book. The younger ones read commentaries from the book (without turning their back to the book). In

45 *Miho chip* 14:21b–22a.

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> the case of the youngest students, their merits and drawbacks are tested and evaluated (and graded like "competent," "roughly," "coarse," and "not competent"). Elders, who are not participating in responding during the lecture can also sit together and listen. (To listen does not mean just listen and nothing more. There must be a real substance of dialogue and debate and only then it could be called "to listen to a lecture." It is not possible to keep one's mouth shut and be silent.) If some people from afar arrive to the meeting and want to listen to the lecture, let it be allowed. (Do not stick to whether they are old or young.) When somebody should answer during the lecture but he just arrived and could not memorize and practice the texts, he for the time is allowed to listen to the lecture together as well.
>
> If somebody for any reason cannot participate, by a later reading he must continue what was read previously by a later reading, finish the volume, and only after that he can start to read another volume. One cannot transgress the order of study and create chaos in the sequence of reading.
>
> Those who were additionally admitted into the lecture roster also always have to follow the original order of reading. Only by reciting they do not have to memorize the complete chapter and they are tested based on a few paragraphs taken from the chapter.
>
> The selected chapters and paragraphs should neither be too many nor too few. Only if the daytime is too short, it can be slightly reduced. When the lecture is completed, everything is again mutually discussed to exhaust the intention of the text and it is finished.[46]

Evaluation strategies of Sŏksil Academy had much in common in other academies. The drawing of lots to establish a fair reading order and the hierarchy between younger and older students were established practices in the majority of academies. Musŏng Academy lecture rituals (*kangsŭmnye* 講習禮) (1873–1880) prescribe that: "An assistant kneels on the left side of the table drawing lots and showing them to students. A student takes the book and proceeds to the table in front of which he bows and kneels. The director of the lecture picks up a paragraph in the book and shows it to the student. The student reads and when he finishes, the director of the lecture questions him."[47] Another important aspect of academy examinations strategies was categorizing students and the demands placed on them. Academy communities became very diverse and many generations of students often gathered together. Academy examinations were also a social event visited by many elderly literati, who, in spite of sometimes still technically being students, were treated in a different way. The youngest students were supposed to fulfil much stricter criteria than their more advanced colleagues and their reading

46 *Miho chip* 14:20b–21b.
47 *Musŏng sŏwŏn chi* 1:37a.

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of texts was in most cases expected to be from memory. The ideal of mastering the classics by heart was rarely fulfilled completely. While the Four Books were indeed expected to be memorized completely, the Five Classics, which are in some cases significantly longer, were reduced to the *Shijing*, *Shujing* and *Yijing*, while the *Liji* and *Chunqiu* were omitted. Such diverse requirements for different layers of the academy curriculum texts are, for example, described in Nogang Academy Study Regulations (*Nogang sŏwŏn chaegyu* 魯岡書院齋規) by Yun Chŭng 尹拯 (1629–1714).

> If we follow the rules, studies are divided into three grades. Reading of the *Elementary Learning*, *Family Rites*, *Xinjing*, *Jinsilu* and books of brothers Cheng and Master Zhu is the first grade. Reading of the Four Books and Three Classics is the second grade. Reading of the histories and various masters is the third grade. The first-grade books must be read completely and exposed and discussed. The second-grade books must be memorized and made perfectly familiar. The third-grade books can be sometimes read completely and sometimes memorized if it is appropriate.[48]

Diversity of students and the requirements placed on them also caused setbacks in the original collegial approach of the academy authorities. Discipline and study results of individual schools were bound to their masters and conditions. A brief comparison between rules of the Sŏksil Academy and the Method of Lectures (*kangbŏp* 講法) by Chŏng Ku shows that some academies were much stricter in dealing with students than others.

Kim Wŏnhaeng, a magnanimous scholar, strove to recreate the idealistic spirit of the Learning of the Way fellowship of the first generations of academies and showed great leniency to all students. Chŏng Ku, who was active more than a hundred years before Kim Wŏnhaeng and confronted with the first signs of deteriorating discipline among academy students in his regulations, proposed a much more repressive approach targeted only at younger students.

> Those who five times receive the grade "no comprehension" are expelled from the reading. Those who three times do not participate are expelled from the reading.
>
> If anybody is graded "no comprehension", he receives thirty cane strokes. If he fails to comprehend both texts, beatings on the naked skin are not yet allowed. Distinguish between light and heavy cane beatings, in serious cases it should be not more than thirty strokes on naked skin, in less serious cases it should not be less than ten strokes. After the punishment, order the culprit to be present by the next lecture and make him be the first by the next lecture of the month.[49]

48 *Myŏngjae yugo* 30:9b.
49 *Han'gang sŏnsaeng sokchip* 4:18b.

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The seeming contradiction between the stress on dialogue and discussion and the flogging of students reflects the broad social heterogeneity of academy communities, which in their higher echelons organized prestigious lectures visited by hundreds of scholars, but in some cases were relegated to the role of better schools for the local youth. Even with the best intentions of academy founders embodied in the curriculum, regulations were limited by economic restraints; feeding a permanent community of students was as costly as were the visits of famous scholars and honorary guests. Many late Chosŏn academies resorted to hold only short gatherings of students once or twice a year and lectures became rare events conducted only if sufficient funds were available. Under such circumstances it was difficult to keep the high standards of Learning of the Way studies, preached by the founding generation of Korean academies. On the other hand, academies never fully resigned their educational role and most of the extant documents of the evaluation of knowledge in academy compounds originated in the late Chosŏn, a time usually associated with a decline of the academy system.

Snapshots of Knowledge

Academy authorities were limited by economic, and often also political, circumstances of their particular institutions. Many late Chosŏn academies were reduced to mere ritual establishments that focused on venerating Confucian worthies, not seldom monopolized by mighty local families. At the same time, even the oldest academies, if not connected to the ruling political faction, were struggling to provide regular support for student education and lectures. The efficiency of academies as mediators and centers of Confucian knowledge significantly differed, but it also gave birth to various new forms of student knowledge assessment.

Certainly, the most intriguing aspect of the academy examination system lies in the extant textual evidence, which gives us a chance to trace the ups and downs of academy students. Bureaucratic routines in academy communities and stress on written records allow us to not only see the results of education as mirrored in examinations results, but also glimpses into the process behind academy studies. Unfortunately, the corpus of materials related to academy examinations is very fragmented Although the academies were supposed to document and archive all documents related to education and examination processes, very few documents survived the official abolishment of almost all academies during the rule of the Hŭngsŏn Taewŏn'gun 興宣 大院君 (r. 1864–1873) and the subsequent turmoil of the modern age. The destiny of hundreds of thousands of documents was to a large degree determined by their relative low status. Academy scholars in the time of crisis sought to rescue the most valuable documents: academies chronicles, rosters of academy directors, circular letters, other official documents, and of course the academy books.[50] Handwritten notes documenting failures or progress of ordi-

50 This corresponds also with the approach of North Korean authorities, which confiscated and stored in the National Archive only the most important documents, academies chronicles

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nary students many decades ago were not considered to be important and in most cases were lost or discarded.[51]

Nevertheless, there still remains a number of materials revealing the actual practices of the late Chosŏn academies. Two relatively well preserved sets of documents are related to formidable institutions: Sosu Academy, which was the first Korean academy, and Pyŏngsan Academy 屛山書院, which traces its origin to T'oegye's disciple and famous scholar, statesman Ryu Sŏngnyong 柳成龍 (1542–1607). Both academies escaped the Taewŏn'gun's abolition command, survived the Korean War and are located in the southern part of the peninsula, which enabled at least a partial preservation of their archives.[52]

A series of records of Pyŏngsan Academy show the key features of its eighteenth-century practice of lectures and reading sessions, as well as their ideological background. The most interesting cluster of documents are records related to lecture activities in the year *sinch'uk* (1781). A commemorative text written by a direct descendant of Ryu Sŏngnyong, Ryu Chongch'un 柳宗春 (1720–1795), highlights the importance of these events and describes the role of lectures for the academy. He stresses that the old custom of regular lectures declined so the academy "assembled students to read and lecture on the text of the *Great Learning*, since ancient people, who established academies to lecture to scholars, made such a rule." The lectures were intended to revive the original spirit and purpose of the academies, since

> old academies were originally established to teach and lecture in order to educate scholars and not only for sacrifices to Confucian worthies […] Academies nowadays act contrary to that and what they value are sacrifices and that's all. It has come to the point that even when academies assemble disciples to engage in refinement and students are present and should be instructed, it all ends in [focusing] on state examinations, success and profit. Desolation in matters of lectures and debates come up to this.[53]

While these statements could be taken as a rather rhetorical emphasis on the importance of lectures, there is no doubt that in 1781 the lectures were taken as proof for the academy's devotion to the ideals of Confucian education.

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and a few important documents, and obviously ignored the rest of academies archives. See Vladimir Glomb, Eun-Jeung Lee, "Between Ruins and Relics: North Korean Discourse on Confucian Academies", in *Confucian Academies in East Asia*, ed. Vladimir Glomb, Eun-Jeung Lee et al. (Leiden 2020), pp. 489–490.

51 An overview of extant documents is offered by Kim Chaun, "Chosŏn sidae sŏwŏn kanghak kwallyŏn charyo ŭi yuhyŏng kwa t'ŭkching", *Yuhak yŏn'gu* 48 (2019), pp. 129–171.

52 On the history of the archives of Pyŏngsan Academy see Kim Myungja, "The Archives of the P'ungsan Ryu Clan", in *Collect and Preserve. Institutional Contexts of Epistemic Knowledge in Pre-modern Societies*, eds. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, Jochem Kahl et al. (Wiesbaden 2021), pp. 199–216.

53 *Pyŏngsan sŏwŏn kŏjae an*, sinch'uk (1871), p. 2.

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The lecture followed an established order and was considered to be very successful. The author of the record described the main features of the event in the following words:

> At that moment all students were assembled in the broad circle, just about sixty of them, everybody holding his copy of the *Great Learning*, seated in a proper order according to the etiquette, a truly solemn and magnificent scenery. After all were seated, according to the order they one by one advanced in front of two lords, bowed and while kneeling read one part of the *Great Learning*, roughly expounded questions and meaning of the text. Various gentlemen in the assembly each subsequently explained what they could do about it and repeated it several times. Only after that others also advanced to read another paragraph and expounded questions and meaning in the same manner as well. The lecture started since the day *kyemi* (eleventh day) and lasted four days till the day *pyŏngsul* (fourteenth day), when it was finished.[54]

An important part of the lecture records was the student roster, which recorded names, ranks, and the age of all participants. It shows that age of the participants was ranging evenly from the oldest, 74-year-old student (*yuhak* 幼學) Yu Sŭp, to 16-year-old Yu Tal, the youngest one. The lecture on the *Great Learning* was the important event, which was still followed by other activities in the academy. In the same year the academy organized a study stay for students, which was recorded in the "Roster of the Study Stay in the Tenth Month of the Year *sinch'uk* (*Sinch'uk siwŏl il kŏjae an* 辛丑十月 日居齋案). Unlike the lecture on the *Great Learning*, students during the study stay were assigned particular texts that they were supposed to master. The study stay lasted significantly longer, altogether four rounds, which dragged from the beginning of the tenth month and continued on for several weeks. In this case, not only the names and ages of the participants, who were generally much younger than participants of the lecture, were recorded, but also their individually assigned texts. The records of the first and last rounds indicate in detail the actual texts studied by the academy students on this occasion.

> First round, from the sixteenth day to the end of the month
> Yi Chobŏm, Kyŏngyun, *kabin* year (1734/ age 48), Master Zhu's letters (*Chusŏ* 朱書)
> Yu Sŏnghyun, Kwangguk, *ŭlmyo* year (1735/47), Master Zhu's letters
> Yu Kyŏngjo, Sŏkchi, *kyŏngjin* year (1736/46), *Zhongyong*
> Chŏng Sangho, Sŏngyak, *ŭlmyo* year (1735/47), *Zhongyong*
> Yi Chŏngdong, Chunghwa, *muo* year (1738/44), *Lunyu*
> Kim Ryongp'il, Ugyŏng, *pyŏngjin* year (1736/46), Master Zhu's letters
> Nam Pŏmgu, Kunsŏk, *kimi* year (1739/43), Master Zhu's letters
> Kim Ryonghoe, Kyŏngje, *kyŏngsin* year (1740/42), Master Zhu's letters

54 Ibid., pp. 2–3.

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fourth round, from the first day of the twelfth month to the day of full moon
Yi Sahyŏn, Kyŏngdŏk, *kapcha* year (1744/38), *Xici*, *Zhongyong*
Yi Sanguk, Kcnjung, *chŏngmyo* year (1747/35), *Daxue*
Kwŏn Myŏn, Yunjung, *chŏngmyo* year (1747/35), *Shizhuan* 詩傳
Kim Yangsŏn, Hoju, *chŏngmyo* year (1747/35), *Daxue*
Kim Sibong, HanX, *ŭrhae* year (1755/27), resides in Yean, *Daxue*
Yi Hakjo, Yubŏm, *ŭrhae* year (1755/27), *Shuzhuan* 書傳
Song Iksŏng, Kyeji, *kyŏngo* year (1750/32), *Shizhuan*
Kwŏn Pyŏngdae, Igŭk, *pyŏngja* year (1756/26), *Daxue*
Kim Hosin, Kyŏngsa, *kimyo* year (1759/23), Master Zhu's letters
An It'ae, Yŏang, *kyŏngjin* year (1760/22), *Lunyu*
Yu Chŏngjo, Kihyŏn, *kyŏngjin* year (1760/22), *Shuzhuan*
Nam Ibok, Sasŏng, *sinsa* year (1761/21), *Shizhuan*
Nam P'ilgu, Sŏngso, *kyemi* year (1763/19), *Zhongyong*
Yi Yŏryang, Tŭkp'il, *kyŏngjin* (1760/22), resides in Yŏch'ŏn, *Shizhuan*

Since Pyŏngsan Academy belonged to T'oegye's intellectual tradition (he was also quoted in the lecture introductory text), we may presume that "Master Zhu's letters" were probably studied via T'oegye's edition *Chujasŏ chŏryo* 朱子書節要 (The Abbreviated Essence of Master Zhu Xi's Letters). Far more important, however, is the fact that the students focused on some parts of the classical canon, while notably omitting some of the Five Classics. *Liji* and *Chunqiu* were obviously considered to be too lengthy and complicated to be used during the academy stay.[55] Neither the lecture on the *Great Learning* nor the study stay documents record the participants' evaluation, and both events were probably based on the traditional method of dialogue between participants and scholars chairing the events.

A different approach towards the evaluation of knowledge is contained in documents related to lectures in the year *kiyu* (1789). The lecture roster records the names and ages of participants together with a precise identification of the book passages that they were reading and the results of the examination. Another part of the roster included names of "youth" (*tongmong*童蒙) indicating the age and examination results of the youngest students. A sample of several students out of the forty-one graded participants show that the reading lecture focused on classics. Examined texts included even difficult texts of Zhu Xi's *huowen* commentary, indicating an advanced level of readers.

55 This corresponds with Martin Gehlmann's findings concerning the role of the *Liji* in Korean Confucian academies, see Martin Gehlmann, "Rituals and Confucian Academies in Korea. Practical Applications of the Liji", in *Autour du Traité des Rites*, eds. Anne Cheng, Stephan Feuillas et al. (Paris 2021), pp. 355–380.

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Kim Yugŭn, Silji, *imsin* year (1752/30), *Shijing*, Deer Songs (*Luming* 鹿鳴) chapter, approximately
Kim Hyŏnju, Myŏngdal, *muin* year (1758/24), *Zhongyong*, tenth chapter, competent
Kim Hosin, Mubaek, *kimyo* year (1758/23), *Daxue*, first chapter of the classic, approximately
Kim Sijŏng, Myŏngjung, *kimyo* year (1758/23), *Zhongyong*, head chapter, approximately
Man Ch'ogwi, Hyŏngno, *kimyo* year (1758/23), *Shujing*, Canon of Yao (*Yaodian* 堯典), approximately
Kim Ilgŭn, Manji, *kimyo* year (1758/23), *Shujing*, Counsels of the Great Yu (*Da Yumo* 大禹謨), approximately
Nam Sigu, Sajŏng, *kyŏngjin* year (1760/22), *Mencius*, Park of King Wen chapter (*Wen wang* [*zhi*] *yuan* 文王[之]囿), competent
Yu Sŏmjo, Iljin, *kyŏngjin* year (1760/22), Supplement to the *Daxue*, seventh chapter, competent
Yi Yangsil, Sugyŏng, *sinsa* year (1761/21), *Daxue*, eight chapter, approximately
Yi Kwangdu, Kunhyŏn, *sinsa* year (1761/21), *Daxue*, tenth chapter, excellent competent
Yi Yŏngil, Hyŏnggi, *imo* year (1762/20), *Daxue huowen*, approximately
Yu Samok, Sahŭm, *imo* year (1762/20), *Daxue*, chapter on authenticity (*cheng* 誠), competent

The lecture records from the Pyŏngsan Academy show rigorous testing of students via selected parts of classics that were assigned to them during their stay at the academy. The relatively good results of participants also indicate a non-competitive nature of the gathering; the main goal was for students to learn the classics, not to win a competition.

The purpose and scope of academy activities significantly changed during late Chosŏn times and the institutions struggled to accommodate both the changing demands of students and the significant economic setbacks. Academy authorities were still convinced of their role to maintain pure Learning of the Way education, but it had become increasingly difficult to fulfil it. Sosu Academy was the oldest Korean academy, yet even this school faced serious limitations to pursue its Confucian mission during the early nineteenth century. Materials concerning its educational practices were lost in most cases, but there is a significant corpus of documents collected in academy Miscellaneous Records (*chamnok* 雜錄), which give us a good insight into academy activities in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The most interesting part of the Miscellaneous Records are the materials documenting academy activities between 1826 and 1827 and its new ways of student knowledge evaluation.

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While the early academies are commonly imagined as isolated communities of dedicated students, the documents of Sosu Academy present the school rather as a center of a formidable social network that attracted and connected students, distinguished scholars, and local officials. Students were not residing within the academy compounds and only visited on specific occasions when the academy summoned them. This model was well-suited to local elites who could participate in academy activities, such as lectures of famous scholars or poetry contests, to increase their own social prestige, while at the same time avoiding the limitations and regulations placed upon them by traditional academy education. The change of the role of academies required new forms of activities, which would correspond to this purpose. The Sosu Academy records provide documentation of the year-round teaching activities of the institution, which included poetry exams held in the fourth and sixth month of 1826, reading lectures organized during the eleventh month of the same year, a study stay conducted in the third month of 1827, reading lectures which lasted seventeenth days in the twelfth month of the same year, and a diary of a lecture held from the sixth to seventeenth day of the twelfth month of 1822. The corpus of documents contains not only the correspondence concerning the organization of these events, but also the topics that were lectured and tested as well as the rosters of students and their results.

Compared to early academies, Sosu Academy activities were quite diverse and lasted through the whole year; a circular letter from 1826 states that the academy reserved autumn and winter for study stays (*kŏjae* 居齋) and reading lectures (*t'ongdok* 通讀), while spring and summer were devoted to poetry composition meetings.[56] Spring of 1826 indeed started with the regular fifteen-day poetry composition contest (*sunjae* 旬製), which was somehow unusual (and because of that, probably also well documented). The initiative to call a meeting of scholars and students came from the local magistrate, who also chose the lines to which students would rhyme their poems. Students composed *fu* poetry and short poems and their compositions were collected and graded in the typical triple grade manner of the civil service examinations. The meetings were rather large-scale events; in the round held on the first day of the sixth month, forty-five students delivered a *fu* composition and thirty students were graded for their short poems. The topics chosen for compositions were diverse and involved both classics and literary works; for the twenty-fifth day of the fourth month was for the contest in the *fu* composition selected a line from The Drunken Old Man's Pavilion Account (Zuiweng ting ji 醉翁亭記) by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) and a quote from the *Zhongyong*, while for the short poem contest, a line by Han Yu and quote from the *Mencius* were chosen. Local authorities considered these sessions as highly successful; after the sixth month round, the local magistrate rewarded the two best compositions in both categories with the

56 The details of the yearly routine of Sosu Academy are analysed in Kim Chaun, "Chosŏn sidae Sosu sŏwŏn kanghak yŏn'gu" (PhD diss., Academy of Korean Studies, 2013).

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gift of a fan and one pound of tobacco. Other students were given various amounts of white paper according to their grades.

The whole spectacle is very different from the visions behind the early academies. Instead of concentrated study of the Learning of the Way, we see poetry contests of large groups graded in the style of the state examinations by a local official, who also distributed rewards. While this could be labeled as true "learning for the sake of others," in the strategy of Sosu Academy such events played an important role. Poetry contests were important for bonding with local elites and provided a large number of scholars with the chance to visit the academy and impress important officials with their literary skills. As was mentioned before, the poetry contests were not the only activities of the school; Sosu Academy also pursued another line, closer to the Learning of the Way ideals.

As it was usual in the academy, students gathered in the eleventh month for lectures. A detailed diary shows that on the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh day they studied three chapters of the *Chujasŏ chŏryo*, while on twenty-eighth day they studied the first four chapters of the *Summary of the Comprehensive Mirror* (*Tongjian jieyao* 通鑑節要). Rather unexpectedly, these sessions were also accompanied by a state examination style poetry composition contest that was graded in the standard fashion. The rosters of graded poetry compositions are preserved also for the study stay held for several days in the third month of 1827. Poems also accompanied reading lectures held for seventeen days in the last month of 1827. After students read the foreword of the *Zhongyong*, both for the *fu* and short poem categories, the line from *Shiji* 史記 "I am a son of King Wen, a younger brother of King Wu and an uncle of King Cheng" was chosen as a topic with the rhyme on character *wo/a* 我. In this case, all poems were collected and meticulously graded as well. On the eighth day of the lecture, the participants read Zhu Xi's texts related to the White Deer Grotto Academy and composed *fu* poems on a quote by Master Zhu about people seeking offices and profit.

The reading lecture records are undiluted testimonies of a regular event held by the academy that recorded even the simplest facts, for example that on some days only three or four students came and it therefore was not possible to organize a reading. We have no reason to doubt that these records represent the state of education at Sosu Academy during the early nineteenth century quite well. Composing and grading poetry was an integral part of the singular events that exclusively focused on this activity, but were held as well as part of the reading lectures during student stays. The obvious purpose of this arrangement was to train students in composition skills that would enable them to compete in poetry contests both within and outside the academy. It is interesting to note that the extant records of all reading lectures document the results and grades of the poetry compositions, but do not mention any testing of reading skills, even though in its 1749 rules for students stays Sosu Academy had prescribed that "students should be able to recite the lectured texts with their backs turned to the text and every

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name and evaluation of 'comprehend' or 'not comprehend' should be recorded in the lecture roster."[57]

Poetry composition and grading became a standard tool for the evaluation of student knowledge, yet the academy curriculum remained based on reading classics and commentaries as it always had been. The academy furthermore organized lectures of famous scholars, which were modeled after the old ideals of a living dialogue between master and students over the texts of the Learning of the Way. For the year 1827 the Sosu Academy Records also contain a detailed diary of a lecture conducted between the sixth and seventeenth day of the twelfth month (i.e. in the same days like in the reading lectures mentioned above), which was a splendid intellectual tournament in which the academy scholars read the *Zhongyong* and discussed subtleties of classics exegesis.[58] It is no accident that among the many topics discussed that time was also the question on how to define "learning for oneself."[59]

Poetry contests, reading lectures, and expert lectures were blended in the curriculum of Sosu Academy into a complex mechanism, which served all purposes of the academy well. Poetry contests attracted outside scholars and facilitated interaction with local officials, while the other parts of the year were reserved for study stay and concentrated lectures on the classics.

Conclusion

Since their first appearance, Confucian academies were perceived as institutions destined to remedy the flaws of state education and the civil service examination system Chosŏn. Academies were supposed to enable students to focus on the broader aspects of the Learning of the Way message, which many scholars thought as being neglected or ignored during the state examination process; memorization and literary skills were to be accompanied by true understanding of the classics; self-cultivation and moral progress were to be taken into account properly; and students were to focus solely on their studies and not on mundane success. The spirit of "learning for oneself" endured through the multiple transformations of Korean academies in the following centuries and became a reminder that although the state examinations were an unavoidable fixture on the way to officialdom for many scholars, a true scholar could still pursue more lofty values via studies in the academies.

The academies offered not only a curriculum based on proper understanding of the classics and strenuous self-cultivation, but also new forms of evaluation strategies. The initial ideal of a free and devoted debate between master and disciples was soon formalized and academies introduced complex measures on how to assess both intellectual and moral progress of students. This brought many fea-

57 Yŏngnam munhŏn yŏn'guso, An Chŏng (eds.), *Sosu sŏwŏn chi*, p. 415.

58 For an intellectual context of these lectures see Kim Chaun, "19 segi Sosu sŏwŏn Chungyong kanghoe ŭi t'ŭkching kwa T'oegyehak ŭi punhwa: Hohak ŭi kyesŭng kwa punhwa rŭl chungsim ŭro", *T'oegyehak nonjip* 19 (2016), pp. 355–394.

59 See Song Juntae, Pak Sŏkhong (eds.) *Sosu sŏwŏn chamnok* (Yŏngju 2005), pp. 350–354.

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tures of the state examinations (grading, poetry contests, rewards) to academy compounds, yet it never obliterated that the collegial and essentially non-competitive nature of the academies stood in contrast to the top-down elimination strategies of the state examinations. Due to economic necessities during late Chosŏn times, many academies were forced to curb their programs and held student meetings and lectures less frequently, yet they never resigned to pursue Learning of the Way ideals. Extant documents show that there were still many students who sought to attend academy gatherings and participate in a lively intellectual exchange via readings and lectures, much in accord with the original ideals of the Korean academies.

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Assessing Basic Knowledge: Student Evaluation Examinations in Chosŏn Local Schools

Martin Gehlmann

Introduction

In Chosŏn Korea, enrollment in the local state schools (*hyanggyo* 鄉校) was theoretically open to all commoners and only the lowest class of slaves and social outcasts was explicitly prohibited from attending the schools.[1] Confucian ideology not only placed great emphasis on education as the basis for the recruitment of talented scholar-officials, but also viewed the schools as a place to directly disseminate Confucian values to the general population. School students (*kyosaeng* 校生) were thus granted the substantial privilege of being exempted from military service and military taxes in order to promote scholarship and Confucian learning. Furthermore, in the early years of the dynasty enrollment in the local schools in the provinces or the Four Schools (*Sahak* 四學) in the capital were a prerequisite for participation in the government service examinations – and so, they became the starting point to gain access to a much coveted official position. Although prospective students were technically also required to successfully pass an examination before entering the rosters of the state schools, such entrance examinations were most often not administered.

Due to a decline in government funding and support in the 16th century, state schools started to admit more commoners in return for payment to increase their financial base. With the number of commoner students growing and the quality of teaching staff declining, yangban elites started to shun the state schools and funded their own private educational institutions – Confucian academies (*sŏwŏn* 書院). Concurrently, *kyosaeng* status became synonymous with tax and draft dodging commoners. Under the impression of the devastations caused by the Japanese invasions at the end of the 16th century, the Chosŏn court sought to strengthen its military and finances by tightening access to schools and weeding out "unsuitable" students by making them eligible for military service or military sup-

1 Access to the schools generally followed the same provisions as to who was allowed to sit for the state examinations. Besides the lowest class, there were also some restrictions placed on convicted criminals, sons of remarried women, secondary sons, and descendants of local clerks. See Yi Sŏngmu, *Han'guk ŭi kwagŏ chedo* (Seoul 2000), pp. 187–202.

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port payments. A special evaluation examination for *kyosaeng* was reconfigured to test if school students were actually engaging in scholarship or if they were just idling away their time while evading military obligations. A look at the theoretical requirements and practical execution of these student evaluation examinations (*kyosaeng kogang* 校生考講) reveals the minimum of knowledge a student was supposed to possess and how this knowledge was assessed.

First, a short look at the development of the state schools, their initial functions, aims, operation, and social role will help to understand later discussions and controversies around the restriction of access to schools and *kyosaeng* status.

The Local State School System

The introduction of a comprehensive system of local schools was one of the main policy measures of the new Chosŏn government shortly after its establishment. Although local schools had already existed during Koryŏ times, the early years of Chosŏn not only saw an exceptional drive to establish state schools in every administrative unit of the kingdom, but also efforts to systematize their operation and structure throughout the country. This agenda was advanced and ideologically backed by Confucian scholars, who saw the establishment of a school system as the main avenue to introduce the population to Confucian ideology and morals.[2] The idea of a school in every part of the country appears in Chŏng Tojŏn's 鄭道傳 (1342–1398) organizational framework for administration of the new state, the *Statues for the Governance of Chosŏn* (*Chosŏn kyŏngguk chŏn* 朝鮮經國典).

> Schools are the root of the transformation through education (*kyohwa* 教化). They are where the human relationships are clarified, they are where talents are formed. […] Our country built the Sŏnggyun'gwan at the center to educate the sons of great ministers and officials and the outstanding among the people. Local educators are assigned to educate children and to extend this system so that every prefecture, town, and large and small county all have a local school where teachers and students are placed.[3]

The ruling house certainly shared this notion, but also saw the schools as an instrument to ensure political control and stability throughout the kingdom.[4] Support for the establishment of local schools was especially strong among the early kings of the Yi dynasty who, besides dispatching personnel and urging local mag-

2 See Yi Sŏngmu, "The Influence of Neo-Confucianism on Education and the Civil Service Examination System in the Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Korea", in *The Rise of Neo-Confucianism in Korea*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary, JaHyun Kim Haboush (New York 1985), pp. 145–146.

3 See *Sambong chip* 7:30b. Chŏng included the maintenance and fostering of the local school in his evaluation criteria for local magistrates. See David M. Robinson, *Seeking Order in a Tumultuous Age. The Writings of Chŏng Tojŏn, a Korean Neo-Confucian* (Honolulu 2016), p. 168.

4 See *T'aejo sillok* 1/7/28#3 (1392), *T'aejo sillok* 1/8/7#5 (1392). The schools represented the king's power twofold: through their role in the recruitment process of future state officials and through the educational officials and magistrates, who were appointed from the capital to the countryside.

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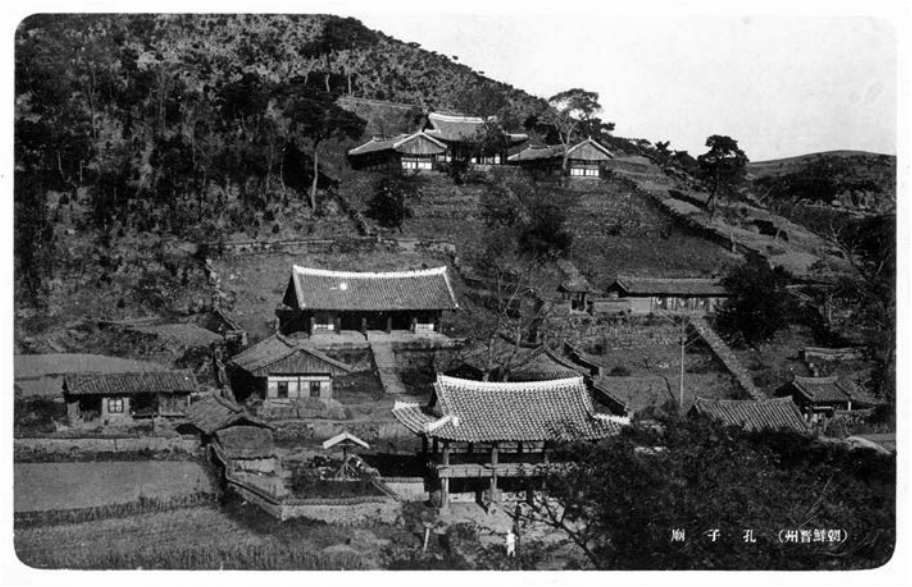

Fig. 3: Photograph of Chinju Local School 晋州鄉校 in Southern Kyŏngsang Province from a Japanese Postcard. In the front the gate, dormitories and lecture hall of the school, in the back, higher on the hill, the shrine buildings

istrates to ensure the operation of the respective local school, also provided land, slaves, and books.[5] It is usually assumed that by the time of King Sŏngjong 成宗 (r. 1469–1495), at the latest, a school had been built in every county. However, it is quite difficult to ascertain this as administrative units often were redrawn and schools were moved, demolished, or simply abandoned.[6]

Local schools generally had two functions. First, they fulfilled their role of preparing rural scholars for the state examinations and thereby provided new talent for the bureaucratic apparatus. Because teachers and administrative staff for the local schools were dispatched directly by the court in early Chosŏn, the educational standards in the countryside were not too far behind those of the capital. School staff and infrastructure were also often actively involved in holding the first local rounds of both the lower and higher state examinations and thus, association with a school was beneficial for aspiring examination takers.

5 See *T'aejong sillok* 6/intercalary 7/6#5 (1406), *T'aejong sillok* 6/intercalary 7/20#1 (1406), also Yi Sŏngmu, "The Influence of Neo-Confucianism on Education", p. 145.

6 Korean scholarship often mentions the slogan of "one county, one school (*irŭp ilgyo* 一邑一校)" that seems to be a modern coinage. See Kim Hoil, *Chosŏn ŭi hyanggyo* (Seoul 2000), p. 10; Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn sidae chŏnnam ŭi hyanggyo yŏn'gu* (Kwangju 2015), p. 194; Kim Sebong, "Hyanggyo ŭi chŏn'guk punp'o mit yŏksa", *Tongyang kojŏn yŏn'gu* 40 (2010), p. 121.

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Second, as the schools contained the local branch of the state Confucius Shrine (*Munmyo* 文廟) they were in charge of holding rites for Confucius and his disciples, which on a smaller scale followed those of the Sŏnggyun'gwan 成均館 (National Academy) in the capital. These rituals were understood as an essential part in the education of future officials,[7] but were also meant to transform and civilize the customs of the countryside. Besides the biannual rites for Confucius, the schools' shrines were also where ceremonies of national mourning or celebration were held. The spectacle of such rituals surely attracted the local community and must have formed a connection between the population of the countryside and the state.

Today, available information about the local school system of the Chosŏn dynasty mostly comes from legal codes, local gazetteers, ritual texts, local school records and rosters, and the royal annals. Accordingly, the picture of the school system and its operation that emerges from these sources is rather conceptual. While these historical resources allow us to trace the changing legal landscape, infrastructural alterations, and shifts in local enrollment and audiences, they unfortunately only provide little insight into the practical educational processes of knowledge transfer at the schools. The virtual absence of concrete descriptions of the realities of school life in the collected writings and diaries of Chosŏn literati is often explained by the decline that the local school system began to experience in the 16th century, which went hand in hand with a dismissive attitude towards public educational institutions among the elite.[8] They not only criticized that schools had turned into hideouts for those who wanted to escape military service, but also decried the low status of students and actively avoided association with the schools.[9] The decline was then exacerbated by the destruction inflicted by the Japanese invasions at the end of the 16th century, during which most of the buildings of the local schools were destroyed. Even though the court heavily invested into the restoration of the school system in the 17th and 18th century, the schools never regained their former educational role, but managed to retain their role as local branches of the state Confucius cult.

What is often identified as the main cause for the decline of the state school system from the 16th century onwards was ironically also its most ambitious ideological objective – to be a place of "universal" education to everyone above the class of base people (*ch'ŏnmin* 賤民).[10] The openness towards commoners contributed to

7 See Park Jong-bae, "School rituals and their educational significance in the Joseon period. Rituals as one of the pedagogical pillars of Confucian school education", *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 51 (2018), pp. 5–9.

8 However, the small amount of such texts about their newly favored institution, the Confucian academy (*sŏwŏn* 書院), suggests that writing or preserving notes about a concrete educational process was generally not a common practice. This in turn raises questions about the dominant narrative of the decline of the local schools and rise of the academies.

9 See Ch'oe Yŏngho, "The Private Academies (Sŏwŏn) and Neo-Confucianism in Late Chosŏn Korea", *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 21, no. 2 (December 2008), pp. 164–167.

10 A few records suggest that the admission of some groups of the base class to the schools was at least discussed. See *Sejong sillok* 14/10/12#4 (1432), "The Minister of Rites stated: 'The new

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the later abandonment of the schools by the state and its elites, which shows the substantial contradiction between the social status consciousness of Chosŏn society and the universalist aspects of Confucian ideology. Later discussions about the deterioration of the school system, the flight of elites into the Confucian academies, restrictions to school enrollment, and exclusions based on the evaluation examinations to bolster the military must be seen as reflections of the contradiction between Confucian rhetoric and the reality of social status in Chosŏn Korea.[11]

Entrance Examinations

During early Chosŏn times, both commoners and yangban were required to pay military taxes and provide military service, although in different capacities and units.[12] Thus, gaining the status of *kyosaeng* – and the exemptions from these obligations – was quite coveted, especially for those seeking to participate in the state service examinations.[13] Theoretically, every male of yangban or commoner background between the ages of fifteen and forty could enroll in a local school; there are even records of sixty-year-old *kyosaeng* being in attendance at the schools.[14] Younger students could also officially attend the schools, but they were not counted towards the attendance limits of the schools and kept in a different roster (*tongmongnok* 童蒙錄). Attendance limits for schools were first introduced during the time of King T'aejong 太宗 (r. 1400–1418) and quotas were decided as follows: 40 students for schools in greater cities (*taedohobu* 大都護府) and special counties (*mok* 牧), 40 students for schools in towns (*tohobu* 都護府), 30 students in greater counties (*kun* 郡), and 15 students for schools in lesser counties (*hyŏn* 縣).[15] However,

paekchŏng outcasts already live mixed with the commoners and both have intermarried and are eligible for military service. If their descendants want to study, they should be allowed to do so in the local schools.' This was followed." Only the lowest class of slaves were excluded to attend the schools. Neither this exclusion nor the inclusion of commoners is specified in the legal codes of the Chosŏn dynasty. See Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn sidae chŏnnam ŭi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, 203–204; also Kang Taemin, *Han'guk ŭi hyanggyo yŏn'gu* (Pusan 1992), pp. 62–63.

11 This contradiction is well explained in James Palais' discussion of Yu Hyŏngwŏns *Pan'gye surok* 磻溪隧錄 (A miscellaneous account of the man from Pan'gye). See James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions. Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle 1996), pp. 205–206.

12 See Yi Sŏngmu, *Chosŏn ch'ogi yangban yŏn'gu* (Seoul 1980), pp. 171–172.

13 Students enrolled in the local schools could also be exempted from participating in the provincial examinations, the first round of the lower examinations, and be chosen by the governor to directly go on to the examinations in the capital. On commoners in the local schools and the civil state examinations see Ch'oe Yŏng-ho, *The Civil Service Examinations and the Social Structure in Early Yi Dynasty Korea: 1392–1600* (Seoul 1987), pp. 91–99. While commoners attended the state schools, their participation and success in the state examinations is a controversial topic. For an overview of the discussion see Palais, *Confucian Statecraft*, pp. 35–38.

14 See Kang, *Han'guk ŭi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, pp. 56–59. However, local difference for admission criteria existed from early on, for example schools in northern Yŏngnam restricted access of secondary sons. See Martina Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors' Eyes. Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea* (Cambridge Mass. 2015), p. 378.

15 *T'aejong sillok* 6/6/27#3 (1406), "The state council decreed that the number of students and

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these quotas were soon criticized as restricting the cultivation of talent and hampering the civilizing efforts in the countryside, as can be seen in a memorial by Censor-General Ye Sŭngsŏk 芮承錫 (1406–1476) from 1468.

> When the number of students at the local school is decided by such a quota and those Confucian students that are outside this quota are to be completely recorded in the military registers, then this country puts a limit on welcoming talent. How can one put a quota on talent and expect to welcome it? I prostate myself begging that the number of Confucian students is not decided by quota and that the methods of the Nine Course School (Kujae haktang 九齋學堂)[16] are to be reinstated: Select those that illuminate the Classics and self-cultivate as teachers, then they can guide scholars in learning and help them to freely advance in study. When their path is not cut short, then the schools will prosper and the talents of this generation will come forward.[17]

Attendance quotas were not abolished, but nearly doubled for all administrative units in the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 經國大典 (Great Code of Administration) that was published around 1475 during the reign of King Sŏngjong.[18] The will to grow student numbers shows that the expansion of education was deemed to be generally beneficial for the country, even though it is unclear if this was meant to increase opportunities for commoners to receive education or was more focused on accommodating the growing yangban class. What the sources undoubtably reveal is that a discussion about the merits of education for commoners existed[19] and that commoners did indeed enroll in the local schools.[20]

With the introduction of attendance quotas, it seems quite natural that entrance examinations for prospective students to regulate access to the schools would fol-

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amount of land of every official school is to be different. In the province capitals the number of students is 50, in greater cities and special counties it is 40 students, the amount of sacrificial land is 6 *kyŏl* for all. In towns the number of students is 40 students and sub-prefectures 30 student, the amount of sacrificial land is 4 *kyŏl* for all. In greater and lesser counties the number of students is 15, the amount of sacrificial land is 2 *kyŏl* for all."

16 A private school founded by Ch'oe Ch'ung 崔冲 (984–1068) during Koryŏ times in his hometown. The nine courses, or nine studies, stand for the nine classics, but also for nine practices of learning.

17 *Sejo sillok* 14/6/20#2 (1468). Usage of *yusaeng* 儒生 is interesting here, as it later came to particularly denote yangban students enrolled in local schools. On the development of the terminology for students see Ch'oe Yŏngho, "Yuhak, haksaeng, kyosaeng ko. 17 segi sinbun kujo ŭi pyŏnhwa e taehayŏ", *Yŏksa hakpo* 101 (1984), pp. 1–21.

18 See Kang, *Han'guk ŭi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, p. 71.

19 *Chungjong sillok* 9/1/28#6 (1514), "The King spoke: […] 'Furthermore, to the matter of the schools; in the provinces there is no comprehensive method of instruction.' Kang Chungjin 康仲珍 (1459–1520) in the audience to the King said that those untalented among the school students can be designated for other labor. An old saying goes 'if the people are not instructed and employed to their abilities, then this is called injuring the people.' One cannot not instruct and then blame [the people] for not being talented."

20 See Yi Pŏmjik, *Chosŏn yugyo kyoyuk munhwa* (Seoul 2022), pp. 123–125.

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low. The *Chŭngbo munhŏn pigo* 增補文獻備考 (Augmented Reference Compilation of Documents) contains the regulations for entrance examinations from the *Hakkyo samok* 學校事目 (school articles) written by Yulgok Yi I 栗谷 李珥 (1536–1584) in 1582.

> Besides the *saengwŏn* and *chinsa*,[21] those scholars in the capital who have set their mind on studying can all enter the lower dormitory [of the Sŏnggyun'gwan] or the Four Schools. In the provinces, no matter if from a powerful family or poor and humble, those that study Confucian texts all can enter the local schools. When they first join, ten students should recommend them for their will to study and after an examination (*sigang* 試講) they are allowed to enter.[22]

There is little information on the actual procedure of this entrance examination. It is important to note that the character 講 (*kang*), here translated as 'to examine' or 'examination', more commonly appears as 'to lecture' or 'lecture.' However, in the context of the Korean educational and examination system, it also denotes a certain form of knowledge evaluation. Examples are the oral tests *hangnyegang* 學禮講 and *chŏllyegang* 典禮講 that were respectively held on basic texts, such as the *Elementary Learning* (*Xiaoxue* 小學), the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 經國大典 (Great Code of Administration), and Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals* (*Jiali* 家禮) before the second round of the lower and higher state examinations in the capital. During these examinations, students were expected to correctly recite and explain assigned passages of the examined text, which must have resembled the process of lecturing.

The *Chŭngbo munhŏn pigo* also includes the *Hakkyo chŏlmok* 學校節目 (school items) by Cho Ik 趙翼 (1579–1655) from 1629, which provide some more information on the content and passing requirements of entrance examinations.

> The scholars and students of the Four Schools of the capital and [the local schools] in provinces are all recorded in the rosters, where their names and ages are written down. If there are new students entering the schools, they are added to the roster. When the new students enter, they are tested on the *Elementary Learning* and if they get a grade better than coarse (*cho* 粗)[23] they are allowed to enroll. Those not on the roster are not allowed to proceed to the government service examinations.[24]

21 The two attainable ranks of the lower state service examinations.

22 *Chŭngbo munhŏn pigo,* Hakkyo ko 學校考 6, 207:16a.

23 This is the lowest grade out of the four passing grades "full comprehension (*taet'ong* 大通)", "comprehension (*t'ong* 通), "slight comprehension (*yakt'ong* 畧通)" and "coarse comprehension (*chot'ong* 粗通)", that are mentioned in the "school regulations (*Hangnyŏng* 學令)" also included in the *Chŭngbo munhŏn pigo*. The description for coarse states: "punctuation is precise and clear, the meaning is explained and understood, but even though the main idea of the passage is grasped, the discussion is not yet fully exhaustive." Ibid., 207:10a.

24 Ibid., 207:19b.

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It is unsurprising that the *Elementary Learning* was the basis for student entrance examinations. The text had been specifically designed by Song Confucians Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and Liu Qingzhi 劉清之 (1130–1195) to be studied by children between the ages of eight and fifteen, before enrolling in a school. Familiarity with the *Elementary Learning* was expected of every scholar and some studied it as thoroughly as any other Confucian classic.[25] The text was also considered to be able to improve the customs of the general population and became translated quite early into Korean vernacular script in two different versions.[26] The contents of the *Elementary Learning* range from admonitions on how to study well, to explanations of the basic Confucian social relations and correct eating and greeting manners – all of which are underscored by a host of quotes and anecdotes from Chinese history. This knowledge was important in the schools because proper behavior was considered a central part of the education of scholars and future officials. Its use also shows that elementary education of children was the basis for advancement into the state schools, which certainly must have been an obstacle for commoners that had no educated family members to tutor them at home.

Even though the aforementioned entrance examinations were suggested, it seems that enrollment in the schools was most often decided by school officials and the local community of scholars. This practice intensified in the 16th century when the state discontinued allocating officials as instructors and headmasters from the capital to the schools and placed this responsibility in the hands of the local magistrates.[27] The magistrates, interested in good relationships with local elites, often passed control over the schools to them. This 'privatization' of the schools by influential families also affected school enrollment, as school rosters became dominated by members of similar descent groups and their affiliates.[28] When in the 16th century reduced financial support by the state forced the schools to seek other funds to maintain operations, and sometimes even generate revenue for their proprietors, the descent groups turned to an increase in enrollment.

It was already common for schools to admit students against payment, but now enrollment numbers in most places went over the official set quota in order to raise financial resources. To circumvent national law, students admitted beyond the quota were designated as extra- or non-quota students (*aegoe kyosaeng* 額外校生), as opposed to the students that had been admitted within the quota (*aengnae kyosaeng* 額內校生). Theoretically, quota students were of elite background and enrolled in the schools in order to be eligible for the state examinations, while

25 On the structure, use, and history of the *Elementary Learning* see Theresa M. Kelleher, "Back to Basics. Chu Hsi's Elementary Learning (Hsiao-hsüeh)", in *Neo-Confucian Education. The Formative Stage*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary, John W. Chaffee (Berkeley 1989), pp. 219–251.

26 See Chŏng Hohun, *Chosŏn ŭi sohak. Chusŏk kwa pŏnyŏk* (Seoul 2014), pp. 15–17, and also Yi Sŏngmu, *Han'guk kwagŏ chedo sa* (Seoul 1997), pp. 339–340.

27 See Yi Sŏngmu, "Chosŏn ch'ogi ŭi hyanggyo", in *Yi Sangok paksa hoegap kinyŏm nonmunjip*, ed. Yi Sangok (Seoul 1970), pp. 244–245.

28 See Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn hugi hyanggyo yŏn'gu* (Seoul 1990), pp. 93–100.

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non-quota students supposedly were secondary sons and commoners that joined the schools mainly to avoid military duty.[29] Although both groups were separated by assigned tasks and living spaces within the school – elite students stayed in the eastern dormitory and commoners in the western dormitory – they all enjoyed the same benefits of student status.

Already in 1517 Censor Mun Kŭn 文瑾 (1471–?) criticized enrollment practices in the local state schools.

> The students (*kyosaeng*) in the provinces just place their names in the register of scholars. Some are sixty years old, but do not know one character, using the local school as a place to escape [service] obligations. Those that correctly understand writing, out of embarrassment, rather not place their name in the school [registers], as there are many other ways to avoid these [obligations]. Those that are instructors and teachers, make the rest gather firewood or herd cattle, filling their numbers in order to make a living and gain profits. If this is the idea of the state in building local schools, then they are only decoration and nothing else.[30]

Students from elite families started to shun the schools, not just because of the deterioration of educational quality, but also because they sought to avoid association with the increasing number of commoners that flocked to the schools. They joined local academies or designated their status with terms like *yusaeng* 儒生 (Confucian student) or *ch'ŏnggŭm* 青衿 (young student)[31] in an effort to distinguish themselves from the commoner *kyosaeng* at the state schools. Admission to the academies varied between Confucian egalitarian notions of welcoming anyone committed to scholarship and more restrictive enrollment practices of only letting scholars who had already passed part of the state service examinations join.[32]

With increasing student numbers, the state sought to regain control over those seeking shelter in the local schools from military obligations, especially after the Japanese invasions had revealed the dismal state of the Chosŏn military. Besides an attempt to update military rosters through a census survey, the court sought to enlarge the military tax base after 1600 by reconfiguring the student evaluation examinations.[33] The gradual institutionalization process of this evaluation

29 See Kim Sŏnghye, "Chosŏn sidae hyanggyo ŭi kyogwan mit kyosaeng e kwanhan yŏn'gu", *Kyoyuk sasang yŏn'gu* 12 (2003), pp. 13–14.

30 *Chungjong sillok* 12/8/22#1 (1517).

31 The term literally translates as blue lapel or blue collar and has its origin in the poem 'Zijin' 子衿 from the *Shijing* 詩經. Blue or turquoise-collared robes are said to have been worn by students during the Zhou dynasty, a custom that was imitated during Tang and Song times and thus became synonymous with a young student in Korea as well.

32 Ch'oe Yŏngho, "The Private Academies (Sŏwŏn) and Neo-Confucianism in Late Chosŏn Korea", pp. 149–153.

33 See Hur Nam-lin, "Confucianism and Military Service in Early Seventeenth-Century Chosŏn Korea", *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 8 (2011), pp. 62–65.

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examination reveals an intense struggle around the question of what constituted adequate knowledge and status of a student and how both were to be assessed.

Evaluation Examinations

The implementation of a student evaluation examination around the year 1600 by itself was nothing new. Similar evaluation examinations had already been prescribed in the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* in the middle of the 15th century.

> The governor of each province shall select a number of students (*kyosaeng*) in the province by setting up a large assembly every sixth month and appointing three officials (either teachers or idle scholars) to examine by oral lecture or written test. The most excellent students (five each from Kyŏngsang, Chŏlla, and Ch'ungch'ŏng province and three from each other province) are to be reported to the court and can advance directly to the second round of the lower government service examinations. […] When the governor regularly travels the area for the evaluation exams, based on the study rule of encouraging goodness and chastising evil,[34] a registry is made and when the educational officers are reviewed, this is based on the examinations. Excellent students in the monthly class or daily lectures have their school duties reduced.[35]

Compared to these earlier examinations, the student evaluation examinations (*kyosaeng kogang* 校生考講) introduced at the beginning of the 17th century were not just awarding outstanding scholarship, but were now focused on punishing failure. It had not been uncommon to penalize bad performance in the evaluation examinations with corporal punishment.[36] But now, failing the updated examinations would mean the loss of student status and thus, the revocation of exemptions from military taxes and service. This shift in focus from advancement to restriction stood in direct contradiction to the Confucian principles the Chosŏn state had been founded upon. Accordingly, the introduction of such student evaluation examinations was difficult to justify within the framework of Confucian rhetoric and the government constantly struggled to portray the examination as an instrument to promote scholarship, especially when the exam later became more of a fiscal matter than an educational measure.

What the new student evaluation examinations retained, at least initially, was a universal scope. Everyone enrolled in the local schools or claiming student status had to take the test. Because the exam threatened one of the main benefits of elite status – exemption from military service – there was widespread opposition to their implementation that sometimes even turned into violent upheaval. Already in 1601, students surrounded the Border Defense Council (*Pibyŏnsa* 備邊司)

34 From *Zuozhuan* 14.4(5).
35 *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, Yejŏn 禮典, 3:41a–42a.
36 See *Ch'ogan ilgi*, p. 122.

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Fig. 4: Depiction of Hamhŭng Local School 咸興鄉校 in Southern Hamgyŏng Province on a Japanese Postcard, ca. 1939

and the Military Training Agency (*Hullyŏn togam* 訓鍊都監) and forced King Sŏnjo 宣祖 (r. 1567–1608) to relax the severity of the punishment for failing the new examination.[37]

The constant Jurchen threat at the northern border that eventually culminated in the two invasions of 1627 and 1636 reestablished the urgency to find a remedy for the underfunded military and forced the state to press the examination issue in lieu of other options. Its attempts to institute stricter evaluation examinations were consistently met by fierce opposition from yangban families seeking to defend their military service exemptions. For the next one hundred years the government struggled with the elites over scope and style of the evaluation examinations. This conflict around the exams found its highpoint in the declaration of official regulations in 1644, which were revised in 1705 and 1711, and only lost its significance after the promulgation of the equal military tax by King Yŏngjo 英祖 (r. 1724–1776) in 1750.[38]

37 See *Sŏnjo sillok* 34/3/15#5 (1601), and also Hur, "Confucianism and Military Service", pp. 64–66.
38 See Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn hugi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, pp, 150–151. On the institution of the equal military tax see JaHyun Kim Haboush, *The Confucian Kingship in Korea. Yŏngjo and the Politics of Sagacity* (New York 2001), pp. 102–116.

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Content and Procedure

When the state started to define the content examined in the student evaluation examinations, it thereby defined the minimum amount of knowledge a mature student was expected to possess. However, the exclusionary focus of the examination forced the state to continuously specify and revise the regulations for examined content and testing procedures because students, and even examiners, used every available opportunity and loophole to undermine the new examination. The exclusionary nature of the new examination necessitated a clearer definition of the knowledge required to pass the examination than in earlier evaluation examinations or the state service examinations. The process of institutionalizing the student evaluation examination after 1600 is thus marked by an increasing codification of testing procedure and content.

Descriptions of the examination in the early 17th century, found in the diaries of Confucian scholars, show how the examination was sabotaged quite immediately after its inception.

> 37th year (of the reign of King Sŏnjo), Intercalary 9th month, 15th day [1604]
> Clear weather. In the morning the inspector sent a servant to give us the news that several scholars had come to the residence. After eating, the inspector called the Confucian students to enter the examination ground. Several scholars as well as family members of the examined students attended the meeting. I observed that the non-quota students had all asked others to take the exam instead of them. Moreover, the inspector had already failed so many, so he was rather lenient at the end. […]
> The court had made it a rule that the student evaluation examination was to be held every three years, and after the war this was to start this year. The inspector did not want to entrap [wrongly fail] people. Those that had failed the reading during the exam, could once more be examined on what they had read before and if they failed again then they could test once more in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian). If they failed again, then they would be recorded as having failed the exam. If they could just somewhat explain the meaning of the phrase, they were all exempted [from military service]. I even saw that those who had failed, receive another test topic for the writing examination, but if they could not attain [a passing] grade, then they were permanently placed as having failed [the test]. The inspector said: "There are already more than a thousand Confucian students that I have examined, but those that I failed do not amount to twenty yet. Thus, even those that failed also do not blame me."[39]

The author, the literati Kim Ryŏng 金坽 (1577–1641), of the above description was still preparing for the state examinations himself when he witnessed one of the first implementations of the student evaluation examinations in the area of Yean,

39 *Kyeam illok* 1:27–28.

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close to the town of Andong, in Northern Kyŏngsang province.[40] Later diary entries by him also describe multiple instances of blatant cheating during the exams, most commonly by proxy test taking, which was mostly ignored or even tolerated by the examiners.[41] Another time he describes how a large number of students were exempted from having to take the test because they only arrived when the examiner was about to conclude the examination.[42]

Kim Ryŏng was not the only observer who left behind an account of the rather lenient and uncoordinated nature of the early exams. Chŏng Kyŏng'un 鄭慶雲 (1556–1610), in his diary entries of spring 1602, mentions how he wanted to accompany his nephew to take the evaluation examination in Sanyang, also close to Andong, but could not go because he did not have a horse. When the nephew returned the next day, Chŏng records that he was happy because his nephew had passed the examination on the *Elementary Learning* with the lowest possible passing grade of "coarse," but also records his unhappiness due to the fact that nobody had failed the exam at all.[43] Two years later, in the winter of 1604, a similar result presented itself again as every examinee, including Chŏng's nephew, passed the examinations in Anŭm.[44]

Because the examined content, testing format, difficulty, and severity of punishment greatly depended on the examiner, who had no reason to antagonize the local elites, all kinds of subterfuge were possible to avoid failing the exam. It is no wonder that with the lax attitude of the inspectors in charge, the numbers of newly designated military tax-payers consistently remained disappointing for the state.[45] The court sought to strengthen examination regulations in the summer of 1626 by laying out the expected educational advancement of students and introducing a two oral-exam rule, as can be seen in later reports by scholar-officials to the court.[46]

> Those over the age of fifteen years will all be tested in the *Elementary Learning* and the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學). Growing up to this age, one can understand the *Great* and the *Elementary Learning*, but it is not easy, even

40 The diary of Kim Ryŏng also describes many local examinations in the area that were part of the state examinations as well as quite frequent violations of examination protocol. See Ch'a Mihŭi, "Kyeam illok ŭl t'onghae pon 17 segi chŏnban mun'gwa kyŏngsangdo hyangsi", *Han'guksa hakpo* 53 (2013), 308–317.

41 *Kyeam illok* 1:27–29.

42 *Kyeam illok* 1:106.

43 *Kodae illok* 3:352. See also Hur, "Confucianism and Military Service", p. 66. Chŏng had actively participated in the war as part of the righteous army. See Thomas Quartermain, "State Symbols, Group Identity, and Communal Memory in Jeong Gyeong-un's Godae illok, 1592–1598", *Review of Korean Studies* 22.2 (December 2019), p. 71.

44 *Kodae illok* 4:426. Anŭm is today Anŭi district in Hamyang County, Southern Kyŏngsang Province. The local school of this area had burned down during the Japanese invasions and was only restored in 1607.

45 See Hur, "Confucianism and Military Service", p. 67.

46 The original regulations, as defined in the *Articles of Military Administration* (*kunjŏng samok* 軍政事目) of 1626, are not extant. See Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn hugi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, p. 131.

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> when raised in a scholarly family. Furthermore, of the destitute people of the countryside, after fighting in the war and having to provide corvée labor, many of them have been unable to attend school. In just one year how can they achieve this [to succeed in the examinations]? This lowly official thinks, that from the age of the fifteen to twenty they should follow the books to be read, like the *Summary of the Histories* (*Saryak* 史略),[47] the *Comprehensive Mirror* (*Tongjian* 通鑑)[48] or the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經) and be tested in one of their choice. Those older than twenty should first be tested according to the regulations.[49]

Opposition to the new regulations by scholar-officials in the capital and the countryside most strongly objected to the main goal of the evaluation examinations – the inclusion of elites in the military tax base. They viewed the potential of elite members failing the exams and becoming eligible for military service as degrading to them, as if they were to become slaves.[50]

By law, every student over the age of fifteen was now to be tested on the *Elementary Learning* and the *Great Learning*. If they failed one of the tests, they were designated as military students (*muhak* 武學), students studying for the military service examinations. If they failed both tests, they were to be immediately recorded in the population registers for military service.[51] Although this change now defined the contents of the examination, it seems that it did not help with the arbitrary use of the vague assessment criteria by examiners. Kim Ryŏng records, to his own amusement, an examination held in the winter of 1631 that was "like child's play (*yu sa ahŭi* 有似兒戲)" as the examiner just tested knowledge of the Spring and Autumn period as well as the Warring States period as discussed in the first volume of the *Summary of the Histories*. If students were not able to explain these passages, they could then choose their own passage to explain.[52] One reason for the leniency of the examiners was that they wanted to avoid difficulties for the local magistrates, because a high failure rate would reflect badly on them.[53] It seems that class solidarity with fellow officials and students stimulated a general dissent towards the student evaluation examinations that obstructed their effectiveness – an attitude so prevailing that even the king had to acknowledge it. In

47 This is most likely the *Summaries of Eighteen Histories* (*Shiba shilüe* 十八史略) produced in the Yuan dynasty.

48 Most likely the *Summary of the Comprehensive Mirror* (*Tongjian jieyao* 通鑑節要).

49 *Injo sillok* 4/11/21#3 (1626). This report was presented by later Chief State Councilor and reformist Kim Yuk 金堉 (1580–1658) and is also included in his collected writings *Chamgok sŏnsaeng yugo* 7:5a–6b.

50 See *Injo sillok* 4/11/21#3 (1626), also see Hur, "Confucianism and Military Service", p. 75.

51 See *Injo sillok* 4/7/19#4 (1626).

52 *Kyeam illok* 6:8. Kim records a similar case less than a month later, in which the examiner suddenly changed the regulations to the frustration of the provincial governor. See *Kyeam illok* 6:9.

53 See Yi Inbok, "Injo tae kyosaeng kogang ŭi chŏngbi wa silt'ae. Kyŏngsangdo chiyŏk ilgi charyo rŭl chungsim ŭro", *Taegu sahak* 130 (2018), p. 10.

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1627, shortly before fleeing the Manchu invasion to Kanghwa island, King Injo 仁祖 (r. 1623–1649) mentioned the harshness of the examinations as one reason for having "lost the support of the people (*silmin* 失民)."[54]

The operation of the examinations was inevitably interrupted by the two invasions of 1627 and 1636. However, this reminder of the weakness of the Chosŏn military prompted the state to pursue another attempt to efficiently enforce evaluation examinations. The thirteen articles for the administration of the student evaluation examination (*kogang samok* 考講事目), which were made public in 1644, were a direct result of the preceding struggle over how student status was to be assessed and accredited. Taking into account status concerns of elite literati, the articles lessened the difficulty of the examinations while clarifying participation, exemption, and punishment regulations in much greater detail. In content and procedure, the articles sought to consolidate a compromise between the needs of the state and the demands of students, thereby setting a standard for the minimal knowledge of a student.

> First, The Border Defense Council discussed the matter [of the examination articles] and His Majesty decreed that in every province the regulations for the student evaluation examinations are to be recorded, so they are clearly known and can be put into practice accordingly.
> Second, from the already read Four Books and the *Elementary Learning* one book is to be chosen by the student (*chawŏn* 自願).
> Third, from the currently read several histories, masters, and collected writings one book is chosen by the student (*chawŏn* 自願) to recite and explain its meaning (*imgang* 臨講) and not only to read the verses, but also answer questions about it.[55]

Unsurprisingly, the examined contents are the same texts that formed the body of the state service examinations. No official instruction was given on how the chosen texts were to be tested, but the term *imgang* 臨講 points to the fact that this was done in a similar fashion as the oral recitation and explanation examinations held at the beginning of the second round of the higher state examinations. Students were either given the beginning or the middle part of a passage from the examined book and had to completely recite the passage from memory, as well as explain and answer questions about its meaning.[56] What was different to the state examinations, however, was that students could choose the text to be examined in.

54 See *Injo sillok* 5/1/19#7 (1627), "The student evaluation examination is not something we invented. It is based on the classics. Nevertheless, it has turned out to be unsuitable for our times. It was designed to encourage people, but, instead, they complained about its harshness. This is the fourth reason I lost the support of the people." Translation, with slight changes, by Hur, "Confucianism and Military Service", p. 79.

55 *Kyosaeng kogang tŭngnok*, 1a (Shunzhi 1/1/29).

56 See the explanation of *immun* 臨文 in Won Ch'angae et al., *Chosŏn sidae kwagŏ chedo sajŏn* (Sŏngnam 2014), p. 180; and also Yi Sŏngmu, *Han'guk ŭi kwagŏ chedo*, p. 231–232.

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Whether they could only select the book or also choose the passage of the book to recite and explain remains unclear in the 1644 articles. Although the examination corpus was expanded, leaving the choice of the examined book to the students must have considerably lowered the difficulty of the test assignment.

These new regulations on the examination content had already been in use before, as similar wording appears in a diary entry by Kim Ryŏng describing student examinations in 1631.[57] It seems that the new regulations of 1644, at least in this respect, were standardizing already accepted criteria for evaluation throughout the country. Some of the articles from 1644 also deal with the rights and obligations of the inspectors in charge of conducting the student evaluation examinations. Besides postulating that the exams are to be held every spring and autumn, the ninth article also states that "if the examination inspector follows private interests and is unjust, causing people to speak up, then this will be reported to the provincial governor for punishment or the official will be censored by the court according to the complaint."[58] It seems that the court had understood that one of the main reasons for the poor effectiveness of the examinations was due to collusion between examiners and examinees.

Already in 1649, not long after the enthronement of King Hyojong 孝宗 (r. 1649–1659), a former governor's aide named Hŏ Kwan 許灌 (1600–?) wrote an appeal to the court requesting a return to the "old system in which all outstanding among the common people joined the local schools."[59] He condemned the direct conscription of those who failed the evaluation exams without discussing their talents and requested that everyone with full understanding of more than one classic be allowed to enter the schools. However, he also agreed that there was no other way than to fill the military registers with the obviously illiterate. The Border Defense Council assented to his complaint and effectively changed the examined content of the evaluations exams by declaring that "students that have full understanding of one classic are allowed to enter the local schools."[60] Hŏ's complaint shows that opposition towards the evaluation examination was also prompted by the exam's obvious contradiction of Confucian educational ideals.

Even though after 1644 the exams were held more regularly than before, they were still quite often delayed or even suspended due to bad harvests, epidemics, or local unrest.[61] The high frequency of biannual evaluation examinations also led to a decrease of newly designated military tax-payers as the inspectors were often

57 *Kyeam illok* 6:3.

58 *Kyosaeng kogang tŭngnok*, 1b–2a (Shunzhi 1/1/29).

59 See *Hakkyo tŭngnok* 1, 087a–87b (*kich'uk* [1649]/10/26).

60 Ibid.

61 For example, in 1646 the examinations were delayed several times in Hwanghae and P'yŏngan provinces because of bad harvests, see *Hakkyo tŭngnok* 1, 047a (*pyŏngsul* [1646]/8/13). In 1658 the governor of Ch'ungch'ŏng province requested that the autumn examinations be suspended because students had a hard time preparing for the exams during harvest season, see *Kyosaeng kogang tŭngnok*, 3b (Shunzhi 15/9/6). See also Kang Sŏnghŭi, "17 segi kyosaeng kogang ŭi chedohwa wa kŭ unyŏng", *Yŏksa kyoyuk* 73 (2000), pp. 125–126.

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only able to carry out their duties perfunctorily.[62] So in 1665, the court further modified the 1644 articles and decided to only hold one evaluation examination each year officially in order to reduce the burden on the people and to allow for proper assessments.[63] Such changes to procedure and content of the examinations were framed as concern for the people and as adherence to Confucian principles, maintaining that the exams were supposed to promote scholarship throughout the country. In truth, the evaluation examinations at this point had already become a fixture in the revenue stream of the state. Officials were sometimes tasked with fulfilling certain quotas of newly designated tax-payers.[64] Because the state at this point was unable to implement a comprehensive military tax that would include the elite yangban class, it sought to increase its tax income through the examinations, which, however, remained a half measure at best. Most yangban continued to retain their exemption from military service even without enrolling in the schools through a number of illicit, but tolerated methods.[65]

Fiscal interests becoming more important than educational concerns is visible in the next modification of the evaluation examinations regulations in the year 1705. The majority of the new articles discuss the financial penalties for failing the examinations, as well as specifying the exact amount one had to pay in order to gain an exemption from participation. Nevertheless, the state was still forced to delineate examination regulations for content and procedure in more detail.

> Fourth, the rules of the examination forbid the use of books like the *Thousand Character Classic* (*Qianziwen* 千字文) or the *Yuhap* 類合 (Categorized Compendium [of Sinographs])[66] but require that among the classics and histories a book is chosen by the student and a lot is drawn [with the passage] to be examined. His reading and explanation are observed and then his understanding [of the passage] is questioned to determine passing or failing. For those that are skillful and can avoid a failing grade in the book examined that year, as it would not be right to again examine them [in the same book] the next year, the name of the book must be recorded in the register and their reading [and testing] should follow the recommended way of progression.[67]

The included prohibition against assigning children primers shows that examiners were still undermining the examination. Students who failed the examination could now retake the test a year later and then were assigned a passage either from the *Lunyu* or the *Mencius* at random.[68] The *Elementary Learning* was dropped

62 See Kang, *Han'guk ŭi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, p. 173.
63 See *Kyosaeng kogang tŭngnok*, 4a (Kangxi 4/9/2).
64 See Palais, *Confucian Statecraft*, p. 449.
65 See ibid., p. 543; and Yi Sŏngmu, *Han'guk kwagŏ chedo sa*, p. 351.
66 Both are basic children's primers for the study of characters. Since there is no standard translation for *Yuhap* I follow a translation suggested by Ross King.
67 *Kyosaeng kogang tŭngnok*, 8a (Kangxi 44/2/10).
68 Ibid., 8b (Kangxi 44/2/10).

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from the examined volumes and examinees were to be tested only on one book. They could not choose the same book again the following year, but instead were to progress through the standard Confucian curriculum.[69] The new rules further specify that while the students could choose the book, the examined passage was decided by lots. Another regulation reemphasized that evaluation examinations were to be held in large assemblies of students from four or five neighboring counties at once. While this surely made it more convenient for the inspectors, as they did not have to travel to each district separately, it also must have made it harder to properly evaluate a larger mass of students in just one gathering.[70] And indeed, already seven years later in 1711, with the last substantial change to the student examination regulations, this rule was changed again and the responsibility of annual testing was placed in the hands of the local magistrates with the inspectors only reviewing their decisions when touring the county.[71]

The outburst of widespread resistance towards the student evaluation examinations at the beginning of the 17th century reveals a misjudgment by the state regarding the nature and acceptance of the new examination. Students and examiners exploited every ambiguity in assessment criteria, forcing the state to exhaustively specify regulations of the evaluation examinations. This points to the fact that the introduction of an exclusionary examination constituted a divergence from the accepted understanding of the function of examinations, and therefore caused disobedience. However, after the initial failure to implement the exams, the state managed to set basic rules for content and procedure by relying on the established curriculum of Confucian learning and the practices of the government examinations.[72] These rules were seemingly accepted, or the state was at least able to enforce them, but regulations still had to be constantly updated to root out new forms of noncompliance. The actual point of contention between students and state over the examinations was less over content and more about who had to actually sit for the examination and how failure was to be punished. In short, the problem was not the extra test itself, but its new permanent negative consequences.

Scope and Punishment

Discussions about the conscription of students that failed the evaluation examinations can be found even before the Japanese invasions. Already then, the main discussion centered around the question of who would be subject to such punishment. During a royal lecture in the summer of 1557 Kwŏn Yong 權容 (1515–1558)

69 A suggestion to alternate between different texts had been made by left state councilor Min Chŏngjung 閔鼎重 (1628–1692) in 1681. See *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, Sukchong 7/7/9#10 (1681).

70 Yi Yŏnjin, "Injo–Sukchong tae kyosaeng kogang chedo yŏn'gu", *Kyoyuk sahak yŏn'gu* 23/2 (2013), p. 120.

71 See *Sukchong sillok* 37/12/26#3 (1711).

72 On the standard Korean Confucian reading curriculum see Vladimír Glomb, "Reading the Classics Till Death: Yulgok Yi I and the Curriculum of Chosŏn Literati", *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 11/2 (2012).

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suggested to King Myŏngjong 明宗 (r. 1545–1567) that commoners enrolled in the local schools should fill up military posts.[73] It seems that a regulation concerning this suggestion with the evaluation examinations was in preparation a few months later. Censor Kim Yŏbu 金汝孚 (?–?, *mun'gwa* 1549), while in principle agreeing with Kwŏn's proposal, cautiously drew up the limits of such a conscription policy.

> In my view regarding the articles of the Ministry of Military Affairs, sending those students in the countryside that have failed the student evaluation examinations and have no illustrious official among their four ancestors to fill the naval ranks is a proper policy to restore the navy. However, among the students in the countryside, the majority is of noble origins. If they fail the evaluation examinations and are all conscripted into the navy, then all their sons and grandsons forever will have to serve in such low duties. To use people of Confucian attire to temporarily refill the naval ranks would be improper.[74]

The king concurred with Kim's view and ordered that the policy be reconsidered again, which seems to have stifled further discussions on the matter. The main problem seemed to be the legally undefined – but socially important – status distinctions between elites and commoners, and the unwillingness, or inability, of the state to clearly specify elite status and enforce it in the countryside.

A first attempt to actually institute a similar measure came only in 1600, when the Border Defense Council started to hold evaluation examinations on the *Elementary Learning* and designated those that failed the test as military support-taxpayers (*pongjok* 奉足). Instead of having to serve themselves, their extra payment after failing the exam would have been used to support the new standing troops of the Military Training Agency.[75] As mentioned above, this attempt ended in chaos, with the students protesting the new examination and pointing out that there were plenty other idle males (*hanjŏng* 閑丁) hiding out in the countryside that should be conscripted first.[76] They further decried that this "poison of invasive violence, first directed at elites and Confucian students, made them feel wrongfully treated and full of bitterness to no end."[77] As Hur Nam-lin points out, the "poison of invasive violence" denounced here is the possibility of elite members having to provide financial aid to slaves or base people serving in the military.[78]

In 1626, with the new regulations for the evaluation examinations, the court decided not to discriminate between social backgrounds and assigned everyone

73 See *Myŏngjong sillok* 12/6/29#1 (1557). Also in Ch'oe Yŏng-ho, *The Civil Service Examinations and the Social Structure in Early Yi Dynasty Korea*, p. 97.
74 *Myŏngjong sillok* 12/10/21#1 (1557).
75 See Hur, "Confucianism and Military Service", p. 65.
76 See *Sŏnjo sillok* 34/3/15#5 (1601).
77 Ibid., Translation in part by Hur Nam-lin. See Hur, "Confucianism and Military Service", p. 66.
78 Ibid., p. 66fn20.

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who failed the exams directly for military duty/taxes.[79] Examinations, in theory at least, were considered an impartial tool that bypassed unclear definitions of social status. Similar to the state examinations that, ideally, advanced the most suitable candidate for office, the student evaluation examinations were supposed to eliminate all unsuitable candidates. However, opposition to this new rule was staunch and mostly articulated through warnings that this rule would break the social order of the country.[80] In the end, King Injo had to retract the rule and even go so far as to exempt all members of the elite from participation in the evaluation examinations.[81] This set a precedent that was difficult to overturn in the following years. In his description of the 1631 examination, Kim Ryŏng describes how family background exempted some from the examinations as "students in possession of proof [on the status] of their four ancestors were first entered into the registry [as students], but those carrying an identification tag (*hop'ae* 號牌) as non-enrolled scholars (*ŏbyu* 業儒)[82] were entered into the list and had to take the examination."[83] It is unclear whether the capital elites gained a permanent exemption from the student examinations with the retraction of the 1626 regulations, or if they were already exempted before. In any case, after 1627 the student evaluation examinations were focused on countryside students and students in the capital were not subjected to the examination.

Only after the humiliations of the 1636–37 Manchu invasions did the Chosŏn officials and the court seem intent on once again trying to set more stringent and pervasive rules for the student examinations, while avoiding the mistakes of the 1626 regulations. The main concern of the 1644 articles focused on who was actually required to take the examination in order to remove 'false' enrollment in the schools as a method to escape military obligations. While content and procedure were set according to established standards, the bulk of the new regulations discuss mandatory participation. The fourth article of 1644 states that "besides school students or those that are attached to a Confucian academy, or those school and academy students not completely recorded in the registers such as students called non-enrolled scholars, dropouts, or those on leave, as well as the members of the local bureaus (*yuhyangso* 留鄉所) and clerks of the counties, all without fail

79 See Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn hugi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, p. 131.

80 See Hur, "Confucianism and Military Service", pp. 74–77.

81 See *Injo sillok* 4/12/30#5 (1626). This concession came in light of an ongoing discussion about whether capital elites would have to serve in the military. While some officials remarked that it would be unfair to administer the exams only in countryside and not in the capital, others pointed out the special status of the Sŏnggyun'gwan and the Four Schools in the capital as pools for talented officials.

82 The term *ŏbyu* 業儒 took on different meanings. It was originally often used to designate sons of officials that received protection appointments or scholars that simply did not register in the schools. From the time of King Sukchong 肅宗 (r. 1647–1720) the term designated secondary sons that registered for the government service examinations.

83 *Kyeam illok* 6:3.

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have to take the examination."[84] Although the new regulations cast a wider net for participation, informal exemptions for elite members continued. Contrary to the regulations, enrollment in a Confucian academy also still remained a valid method to escape the examinations, because the Ministry of Rites effectively excluded academy students from the evaluation examination in the very same year.[85] Other methods of avoiding the exams and potential military obligations were to feign sickness, to pretend to be in mourning, to bribe those in charge of compiling the examination list, or to simply flee to another county or province.[86]

Article five of 1644 further specifies that both quota and non-quota students of the schools would have to attend the examinations, as discrimination between both groups would lead to "large scale distress."[87] This particular rule addresses what had been another major headache for the government in preceding attempts to implement the student examinations – the locally different status distinctions between quota and non-quota students. In the view of the state, quota students were supposed to be elite students preparing for the government examinations, while non-quota students were secondary sons and commoners that had gained entrance to the schools. If this had been the case, it would have been easy to either simply designate all non-quota students as military tax payers or to only make them sit for the evaluation exam. However, distinction between both groups was far more muddled and therefore presented a problem, as had been already made clear in 1619 by Inspector Hwang Chungyun 黃中允 (1577–1648) of the Office of the Inspector-General.

> Recently, the national laws require every county to get rid of the overflow of non-quota students and replenish the military numbers with them. However, Yŏngnam is the foundation of our country, it is called the home of the scholars and its school rosters are filled because of that. In Andong the original [school] quota is ninety people, but the number of non-quota students amounts up to five–six hundred. Quota students do not necessarily know how to read, and non-quota students are not necessarily not studying. Among them are renowned Confucians and talented scholars, and more than half of them are recorded as non-quota students. If now the student examinations are not held and (without distinguishing between good and bad) it is rushed to in one day make them soldiers, then this act will be the trigger for the state to lose hearts and minds in the southern regions.[88]

84 *Kyosaeng kogang tŭngnok*, 1a (Shunzhi 1/1/29).
85 See Ch'oe Yŏngho, "The Private Academies (Sŏwŏn) and Neo-Confucianism in Late Chosŏn Korea", p. 166.
86 See Palais, *Confucian Statecraft*, p. 543; also Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn hugi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, p. 144.
87 See *Kyosaeng kogang tŭngnok*, 1a–b (Shunzhi 1/1/29).
88 *Kwanghaegun ilgi* 11/12/10#1 (1619).

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It is important to note that Hwang was not opposing the evaluation examination itself, but rather what he viewed as an untenable distinction between quota and non-quota students.

A question that further complicated this matter was the status of secondary sons. Registration as a student in the local schools to gain exemption from military obligations was common practice among secondary sons, thereby at least retaining one advantage of their father's status. Originally, it was tolerated that secondary sons and commoners would join as non-quota students, but with declining numbers of 'proper' yangban students enrolling, the schools soon began to fill their quotas with secondary sons.[89] This made any distinction between quota and non-quota students even more difficult. It was especially during this time that the employment restrictions against secondary sons were hotly debated and also partially revoked.[90] The designation of all non-quota students as military tax payers would have been viewed as arbitrary and antagonized the vocal group of the secondary sons and their advocates. All the more as those secondary sons that actually were registered as quota students, would have remained exempt. Simply demanding all students to sit for the examinations seemed like the rational solution, but it had already failed once before in 1626.

The articles of 1644 thus walked a tightrope avoiding indiscriminate participation regulations, while at the same time seeking to include as many students as possible by explicitly mentioning their designations. In response, elite students around the capital began changing their appellations to young student (*ch'ŏnggŭm*) or *yurim* 儒林, while in the countryside they "built academies as places to dally and idle around, calling themselves academy students (*wŏnyu* 院儒) and are looking at the shrine of the Sage [with the same indifference] as the people of Yue looked upon the thinness of the people of Qin."[91] Starting from 1651, the state attempted to reinforce the rule that enrollment in state school rosters was a prerequisite for participation in the government service examinations. However, this effort to force all scholars under the umbrella of the state and thereby making them eligible for the evaluation examinations also remained ineffective.[92] By the power of their station, many remained outside the state's reach and were not included in the evaluation examinations because the state proved unable to compel comprehensive participation.[93]

89 See Yun Hŭimyŏn, *Chosŏn hugi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, pp. 108–109.

90 See Martina Deuchler, "'Heaven does not discriminate.' A study of secondary sons in Chosŏn Korea", *Journal of Korean Studies* 6 (1988–89), pp. 143–147.

91 *Hakkyo tŭngnok* 1, 037b (*pyŏngsul* [1646]/1/6). This is referencing a quote by Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) from his *Zhengchen lun* 爭臣論.

92 See Yi Yŏnjin, "Injo–Sukchong tae kyosaeng kogang chedo yŏn'gu", pp. 111–112. Access to the state examinations had already been tightened since 1623 with the introduction of a qualification examination (*chohŭlgang* 照訖講), that tested knowledge of the *Elementary Learning* when students registered for participation in the exams. See Won Ch'angae et al., *Chosŏn sidae kwagŏ chedo sajŏn*, p. 197.

93 See *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, Sukchong 7/8/23#20 (1681). Yun Hŭimyŏn supposes that not only acad-

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Another point in which the state seemingly accommodated student interest in the 1644 articles was in its policy for those that failed the exam. The unstated purpose of the evaluation examinations was to enlarge the taxpayer base by revoking student exemption from military duties. This was certainly the most controversial aspect of the evaluation examinations and had facilitated open opposition and deception to escape participation. Accordingly, the authorities had to be quite careful in how punishments were framed and applied if they wanted to avoid hostile reactions like in 1600 and 1626. Failure in the examinations was not instantly penalized with military service anymore. Instead, a second chance was to be given after half a year and only failure in this second test resulted in designation as a military tax-payer.

> Tenth, those that fail the test will be set aside from immediately being assigned to the military, but for the time being will be first demoted to military student (*muhak*) and after an examination phase has passed (一式年過後)[94] can take the examination again as military students. Only those that fail again are permanently designated as a military provisioners (*kunbo* 軍保).[95]

Another reason, besides fear of negative backlash, to relent on the aspect of punishment was that an alternative way of capitalizing on the examinations had opened up. With the introduction of the 1644 articles, the state institutionalized the practice of handing out limited, and in some cases even lifelong, exemptions from the evaluation examinations. Exemptions had been granted before, but were mostly awarded informally by local authorities for virtuous behavior or contributions to disaster relief funds. This practice now effectively became legalized on a national level, with the articles of 1644 stating, that for "those that gained an exemption from the examination by paying a fee in goods […] their written exemption is to be acquired and it is to be inspected whether they have delivered the fee in goods or not."[96] While the amount to be paid for an exemption was not yet precisely stipulated, it becomes clear that this was a lawful transaction that contributed to state finances.[97] However, since the system of paid exemptions developed out of an informal practice, it was ripe with corruption as schools and local officials often privately relied on such collected funds. The state again had

emy students, but also those with hereditary positions or endorsements from high officials were generally excluded from having to participate in the examinations showing that their exemptions from 1626 were still in effect. See Yun, *Chosŏn hugi hyanggyo yŏn'gu*, p. 136.

94 Most scholars interpret *singnyŏn* 式年 here as referring to the three year phase between the government service examinations, but it seems more reasonable to me that this refers to the period between two evaluation examinations. However, it could also mean that they were required to take the triennial military examinations. See Yi Yŏnjin, "Injo–Sukchong tae kyosaeng kogang chedo yŏn'gu", p. 108.

95 *Kyosaeng kogang tŭngnok*, 2a (Shunzhi 1/1/29). Military provisioners had to pay a certain amount of rice or cloth for military upkeep instead of serving themselves.

96 *Kyosaeng kogang tŭngnok*, 1b (Shunzhi 1/1/29).

97 Kang Sŏnghŭi, "17 segi kyosaeng kogang ŭi chedohwa wa kŭ unyŏng", pp. 134–136.

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to react with increased regulatory intervention. A large part of the examination rules of 1705 thus deals with the amount to be paid for exemptions according to status as well as applicable reductions of the exemption fee, that at this point had essentially become a fine to be paid when failing the evaluation exams.[98] Although the exemptions provided some relief for its finances, the state remained reluctant to apply the system too widely and punished what it viewed as improper issuing of exemptions. Besides local embezzlement, the arbitrary application of exemptions also produced a stream of complaints about their unfairness.[99] Many elites also viewed the fine system as an open invitation for commoners to buy into higher social status, essentially weakening the existing status distinctions. And finally, there was the moral aspect of education. Exemptions were supposed to reward moral behavior,[100] but the systematized introduction of a payment-for-exemption-system would have removed any remaining educational function from the state schools – a clear violation of their original purpose. These points, in the minds of many officials, would ultimately lead to a corrosion of the social order, as was argued by left state councilor Yu Sangun 柳尚運 (1636–1707) in 1695 at court.

> People that don't study writing or military arts, but only fear failing the examinations, if they are now allowed exemptions from the examinations by giving payments in grain, then there certainly will be many more that happily follow [this practice]. It is not that I do not know that this grain can be used for relief, but if they are exempted from studying and then again receive exemptions from the examinations for grain payments, then names and meanings are not correct (名義不正)[101] and it cannot get any worse than that.[102]

Ch'oe Yŏngho has argued that exemption from military obligations defined yangban or elite status in the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty.[103] Not only was any association with military duty or taxes therefore seen as an attack on this status and strongly rejected, but the above quote makes it clear that even the extension of this privilege was seen as a threat to elite status. The state sought to work around these sensibilities by applying more detailed regulations for the evaluation examinations and the exemption system, but because the unassailable exemption for

98 And is described as such in Palais, *Confucian Statecraft*, pp. 543–544.
99 See *Hakkyo tŭngnok* 4, 36b (*pyŏngjin* [1676]/12/11).
100 For example, the student Han Yŏgi 韓汝琦 from Hamhŭng who in 1668 risked his own life to save his little brother from a tiger attack and was granted an exemption for his exemplary display of brotherly love. See *Hakkyo tŭngnok* 3, 64a (*musin* [1668]/1/23).
101 This is expression is taken from the *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 13:167, "If the names and meanings are not correct, then matters cannot be put into action. If there is nothing that can be done, all one can do is leave." This chapter of the *Zhuzi yulei* discusses how learning should be put into action.
102 See *Pibyŏnsa tŭngnok*, Sukchong 21/11/24 (1695).
103 See Ch'oe Yŏngho, "Chosŏn wangjo chŏn'gi ŭi kwagŏ wa sinbu chedo", *Kuksagwan nonch'ong* 26 (1991), pp. 171–179.

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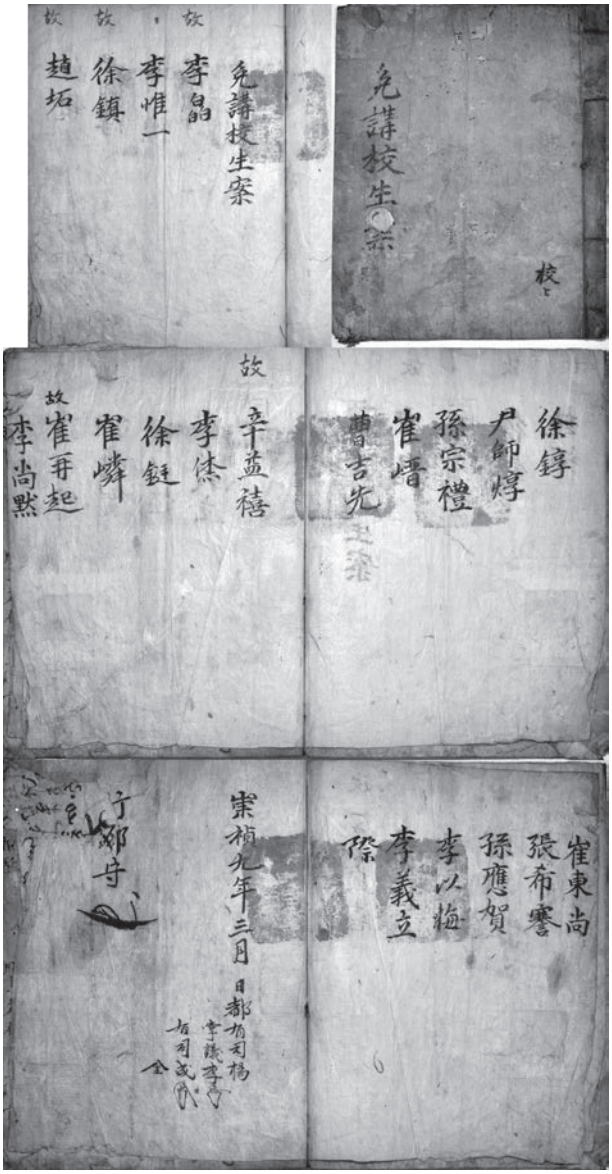

Fig. 5: List of exempted students at Yŏngch'ŏn Local School 永川鄉校 in Northern Kyŏngsang Province from 1636

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yangban elites was never clearly defined, all connected regulations could only retain but a certain ambiguity.

Conclusion

It is correct to understand the elite's opposition to the evaluation examination as mainly motivated by their desire to protect their social and economic privileges. However, as this battle was waged over the semantics of the examinations, the discourse on the student evaluation examination reveals a general understanding of the role examinations were supposed to play in Chosŏn society. Literati often expressed their overall uneasiness about the trajectory of the evaluation examinations with reminders that "the student evaluation examinations were originally introduced to encourage scholarship and not to only fail students and assign them to the military."[104] Although they also accepted that examinations were needed to flush out "illiterate" students, they were acutely aware that evaluation examinations signified a deviation from established examination practices. Even officials that in principle supported the policy were cautious for the state not to overstep its boundaries in applying the exclusionary aspect of the evaluation examination.[105]

Up to this point, state examinations, an essential part of government structure, were framed as celebrations of talent and moral righteousness. Participation and success in the examinations were rhetorically expressed and performed in a manner that implied royal recognition of moral refinement and scholarly erudition, not as successful advancement through a mechanical and bureaucratic selection process. The continued practice of the king personally administering the last stage of the examinations served as symbolic confirmation that the selection process of the government service examinations was based on the criteria of individual virtue and integrity. Palace examinations were an expression of the Confucian bond between ruler and subject, with the ruler bestowing high status or position on righteous scholars in exchange for their unwavering loyalty.[106] Thus, examinations were truly celebratory events. Accordingly, special examinations were often held to honor joyous state events, e.g., the birth of a crown prince or recovery from illness by a member of the royal family.[107] Although the term "grace examination" (*enke* 恩科) was not used in Korea, much of the terminology around the examina-

104 *Pibyŏnsa tŭngnok*, Sukchong 14/1/6 (1688). See also *Pibyŏnsa tŭngnok*, Sukchong 10/5/7 (1680); *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi*, Sukchong 7/7/9#9 (1681).

105 See Kang Sŏnghŭi, "17 segi kyosaeng kogang ŭi chedohwa wa kŭ unyŏng", pp. 127–128.

106 See Iona D. Man-Cheong, *The Class of 1761. Examinations, State, and Elites in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 58.

107 See Park Hyun Soon; Keiran Macrae, "The State Celebration Examination and the Civil Service Examination System in the Late Chosŏn Period", *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 34, no. 1 (2021), pp. 63–71.; and also Park Hyun Soon, "The Special Examinations in Early Chosŏn", *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 28, no. 1 (2015), pp. 56–57.

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tion system was adopted from China and similarly reflected the importance of the examination ceremony in colorful and mostly positive expressions.[108]

The reconfiguration of the student evaluation examinations at the beginning of the 17th century broke with this rhetoric by focusing on the expulsion of students. The examination thereby denied the process of edification and self-cultivation for which schools nominally had been constructed. That this was seen as rupture with past practices becomes clear in the wording used by scholars opposing the new examinations, stressing that examinations were supposed to "encourage scholarship (*kwŏn'gwa* 勸課)" or decrying the "invasive violence (*ch'imp'o* 侵暴)" of the new evaluation examinations. It points to an understanding of examinations as a flawed, but necessary tool and not as a widely accepted meritocratic mechanism of governance. The emphasis on the role of the royal family and the celebratory rhetoric of the state exams was in part a reaction to the perpetual criticism leveled against the examination system. Echoing Chinese discussions, Korean scholars often condemned the practice of the examinations as promoting selfish ambition and opportunistic careerism among students, diverting their minds from true self-cultivation.[109] From the state's perspective, however, examinations were essentially an impartial tool that had proven its worth in the selection of officials and, more importantly, was accepted as such by potential future officials. Accordingly, this tool could be applied in the reverse; to exclude those not suitable for office. In a sense, this discrepancy is mirrored in the separation between education and evaluation that is so prevalent in South Korea today.[110]

The discrepancy also led to a confrontation between students and state that initially seemed to have been focused on what actually constituted a suitable knowledge basis for a student. Such considerations were quickly abandoned and the evaluation examinations were instead discussed as a question of social status as well as a fiscal scheme. This is visible in a suggestion by minister-without-portfolio Yi Yu 李濡 (1645–1721), who in a memorial to the throne from 1711 suggested that "those that understand the text a little bit, can remain on the school rosters, but those that cannot read and have no hope of ever achieving it, should have their names moved to a separate military officer list. Afterwards, the students that fail the annual evaluation exam, as before, pay the fine and are reported to the inspector, who reviews and admonishes them on the basis of the test. The military officers have to take an archery test once a year and those that fail, based on the

108 See John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China. A Social History of Examinations* (Albany, 1995), pp. 157–158.

109 See Vladimír Glomb's contribution in this volume, also for criticism of the state examination system in China and Korea see Palais, *Confucian Statecraft*, pp. 139–149.

110 See, for example, Michael J. Seth, *Education Fever. Society, Politics, and the Pursuit of Schooling in South Korea* (Honolulu 2002), pp. 140–171, and Michael J. Seth, "Educational Development, Society, and Politics in South Korea", in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary South Korea*, ed. Sojin Lim and Niki J.P. Alsford (New York 2022), pp. 11–25. See also the current special issue of the journal *History of Education* on Korea's education fever edited by Klaus Dittrich and Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus.

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number of arrow hits needed to pass, like the students, have to pay a fine of one bolt of cloth."[111] According to Yi, it was for the magistrates to decide who should remain a student and who was to be designated as a member of the military. In any case, both groups had to pay a fine if they failed their respective exams.

Regardless, the student evaluation examinations remained plagued by non-compliance, both from examiners and examinees, because the ultimate goal of the exams was not accepted. The universalist scope of examinations in general, albeit purely rhetorical to begin with, did not translate to the new exclusionary format because it meant that everyone could lose their social status; a preposterous idea in the hierarchical society of Chosŏn Korea. The purpose and criteria of the student evaluation examination were constantly questioned and debated due to the controversial nature of the exam. This provides great insight into how examinations were perceived and administered in Chosŏn. The exams' restrictive focus reveals how strongly the implementation of the examination was actually influenced by socio-political pressures and/or fiscal considerations, and that the exam was only superficially discussed as an instrument for the objective assessment of knowledge. Widespread insubordination created the need for unprecedented regulatory systematization of the examination, but still the examination drew opposition from the elites. Only when the state applied the same ambiguity present in the selection process for government office – a recognition of elite privilege while avoiding its legal definition – the student evaluation examination actually became somewhat effective. Nevertheless, the state still had to remain cautious in implementing the examinations. Capital elites had quickly used their power vis-à-vis the state to elude the threat posed by the exam and its burden shifted on to the countryside, where the state faced a minefield in enforcing the examinations without challenging the local elites. The problem of the implementation of the student evaluation examination thus ultimately came down to high official Chang Yu's 張維 (1587–1638) famous dictum that "we [the state] can afford to lose the minds of the people (*minsim* 民心), but we cannot afford to lose the minds of elites (*sasim* 士心)."[112]

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111 See *Sukchong sillok* 37/9/24# (1711).

112 *Kyegok sŏnsaeng chip* 17:36a. Translation by Hur, "Confucianism and Military Service", p. 80.

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Fig. 6: Depiction of the Buddhist monk Hyujŏng 休靜 (1520–1604), also known as Sŏsan taesa 西山大師, in a North Korean Comic

Buddhist Examinations in Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910)

Gregory N. Evon

Introduction

The Buddhist examination system in Chosŏn Korea was designed to rank and confirm the standing of monks through exams, and if one counts the initial testing required to become a monk, there were, in theory, two separate but related examination systems. However, there was a vast difference between theory and practice with respect to the Buddhist examinations. The historiographical questions are perplexing. First, the Buddhist documents, now readily available and searchable,

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contain little information on the examination system; it is as if the Buddhist institution itself did not care much about such exams. Second, the court documents in the *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok* (Veritable Records of the Chosŏn Dynasty) contain vital – but clearly incomplete – information. The third and most important problem is the massive degree of terminological confusion and inconsistency within the primary and secondary sources. Any attempt to make full sense of the Chosŏn Buddhist examination system is therefore daunting.

At the same time, such difficulties can be useful and understood in relation to what was omitted as well as what was recorded. The picture is imperfect but nonetheless compelling, and it fits with the broader developments surrounding Buddhism from the start of the dynasty. Seen from the longer historical point of view, the Buddhist examination system was a casualty of machinations to strip Buddhist clerics and the Buddhist institution of legal recognition. This chapter examines the crucial features of the politicization of the Buddhist examinations through the court records and legal texts.

Clerical Status in the Early Years of the Chosŏn Dynasty

The question of clerical examinations in the Chosŏn is inevitably linked with practices in the preceding Koryŏ dynasty (936–1392), and many of the problems that prevent a clear understanding of Chosŏn practices are found in the Koryŏ, as well. Among these, several are conspicuous. First, there is a great degree of terminological confusion in part, it seems, because the historical record is so patchy. The term "clerical exam" (*sŭnggwa* 僧科), for example, was uncommon and instead occurs in modern scholarship as a shorthand to describe practices during the Koryŏ dynasty.[1] Much the same is true of the Chosŏn dynasty.

Second, the notion of examining monks – whatever the specific terms used to describe this process or these processes – is itself ambiguous at times because it is unclear whether examination aimed at affirming one's right to become a monk or recognition of one's ranking as a monk. This difficulty was not unique to the Chosŏn dynasty, and a specific instance from 921 – which is to say, before the Koryŏ consolidated power in 936 – bears a striking resemblance to the difficulties that one confronts in the Chosŏn historical records.[2] But the difficulties with respect to the Chosŏn Buddhist examinations are exacerbated by the anti-Buddhist policies that gathered momentum from the start of the dynasty. At points during the Chosŏn dynasty, the distinction between ordination examinations and ranking examinations was clearly drawn at the conceptual level, but there is little to indicate that this distinction was consistently maintained.

This raises the final and most important point, one that centers on the relationship between the Buddhist institution and the state. Key elements in the Koryŏ

1 Sem Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas: The Politics of Buddhism During the Koryŏ Dynasty (918–1392)* (Cambridge, Mass. 2008), p. 185.
2 Ibid., p. 187.

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system appear to have provided a basis for Chosŏn policies that were formalized in the set of statutes contained in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* 經國大典 (Great Code for Regulating the State), the Chosŏn legal code that was finalized in 1484. But the difference is also marked. In the Koryŏ system, the Buddhist institution and its monks were firmly integrated into the structures of the state, and this system, moreover, was desired by the Koryŏ dynasty's founding king.[3]

However, the Koryŏ system was under attack by court officials from the very start of the Koryŏ–Chosŏn dynastic transition. Initial tension arose because the Chosŏn's founding king, T'aejo 太祖 (r. 1392–1398), was a Buddhist and appears to have envisioned a reinvigorated system analogous to what had developed over the course of the Koryŏ dynasty. The king's officials, for the most part, were horrified at that prospect, and the principal difference centered on how they understood the Koryŏ system. As far as can be seen from the historical record, there was wide agreement that Buddhism had become a real political problem as embodied in the disruptions of the monk Sin Ton 辛旽 (d. 1371). T'aejo looked to what was best in the Koryŏ system and accepted the traditional idea that support for Buddhism would strengthen his rule. From this point of view, the root of the problem was the Koryŏ government's failure to oversee the Buddhist institution and its monks. T'aejo's critics insisted that the Buddhist institution itself was the problem. From this point of view, monks who had exerted deleterious political influence were symptoms of a deeper rot in which kings had failed to recognize that Buddhism and its institutional prerogatives had weakened the state. As a result, both sides agreed on the need for action but differed on what action to take.

It is therefore odd that the examination system did not prominently figure in the initial calculations over how best to deal with Buddhism. Given the full weight of circumstances and subsequent developments, this suggests that there was no smoothly functioning examination system in place at the start of the Chosŏn dynasty. An additional factor was the question of clerical licenses (*toch'ŏp* 度牒) and the procedures by which the state granted individuals the legal right to become monks. (The question of nuns is treated sporadically, and I will include reference to them when warranted by the documents.) On balance, this appears to have been a more important consideration, and it was dealt with early in the new dynasty in a piece of legislation with which T'aejo agreed.[4]

The logic was straightforward. Men could legally become monks by paying the government in bolts of cloth, with a sliding scale of cost based on one's social status: the lower one's status, the more expensive it was to obtain a license. Otherwise, men were barred from becoming monks. Although the order appears odd at first glance (offspring of the elite *yangban* class were required to pay the least), the rationale was compelling with respect to the core issue that would recur again and again throughout discussions of clerics and clerical status. The central

3 Ibid., pp. 184, 187–188, 199n42, 203, 236.
4 *T'aejo sillok* 1/9/24#1 (1392).

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question was taxation, which comprised labor and military service on behalf of the government. Granting clerical licenses represented a loss for the government, and so those who wished to obtain licenses were, in effect, reimbursing the government up front. The sliding scale of costs reflected the government's relative future losses.

It is clear, however, that this legislation was ineffective, and we can infer that at least part of the problem was that individual monasteries accepted novice monks and undertook their own procedures with little or no attention to government decrees. A central question therefore is the relationship between taking the tonsure (*sakpal* 削髮), ordination (*sugye* 受戒), and licensing because examinations would only be valid if administered to those who were recognized as monks by their peers and deemed legal by the state.[5]

The complexity of this set of questions is evident in a court record dealing with the forced laicization of young monks and nuns in 1402. Ordination was not explicitly discussed, and instead, the conversation revolved around the sequence by which people were allowed to become clerics. The document emphasized that one was to undergo some sort of examination to prove one's ability (*sijae* 試才); if successful, one then would be granted a clerical license; and finally, those who received licenses could then take the tonsure. Notwithstanding a minor inconsistency in the discussion, the core idea was patently clear: lawful clerical status required prospective monks and nuns to obtain state approval before they could even take the tonsure.[6] This record, however, poses difficulties because it is unclear whether the sequence was, at least in theory, assumed to be in effect or whether it was an idealized vision of the way things ought to work. Furthermore, it had no obvious connection to the regulations from 1392 as discussed earlier beyond the fact that the government was assumed to have the right to say who could become a cleric and under what circumstances.

This 1402 discussion, moreover, was embedded in a particularly thorny political and familial context. It was part of a larger crisis in the royal family that took shape after King T'aejong 太宗 (r. 1400–1418) seized the throne, disobeying his father, King T'aejo. T'aejong was desperate to make peace with his father, while his father was desperate to fend off the anti-Buddhist movement that was steadily gaining momentum. The Buddhist question thus became a meeting ground in a fraught father-son relationship, and T'aejong moderated the anti-Buddhist program as his father sought to block the complete disestablishment of the Buddhist institution.[7]

But despite the severity of the situation, clerical exams, as typically conceived, were ignored. This suggests that there was no effective examination system at the time of the dynastic transition or that if there was, it was not seen as important.

5 Cf. Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas*, pp. 157–168.
6 *T'aejong sillok* 2/6/18#2 (1402).
7 *T'aejong sillok* 2/8/4#1 (1402); Sem Vermeersch, "Yi Seong-gye and the Fate of the Goryeo Buddhist System", *Korea Journal* 53, no. 2 (2013), pp. 142, 147.

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The focus instead fell on clerical licenses, something that proved to be a major problem from the outset as indicated in the 1392 and 1402 court records. Those two, however, are a mere fraction of the official records dealing with clerical licenses, and the overarching point – indeed, the reason for the court's need to revisit the question so frequently – is that there was no effective system to license and keep track of the number of clerics in the kingdom, nor any apparent consistency with respect to provisions.[8]

The problem was openly acknowledged in 1675: no one knew how many clerics existed because the licensing system was defunct.[9] Although the licensing problem was evident at the start of the dynasty, the 1675 complaint had a precisely identifiable cause. It was a direct result of the failure to implement and oversee consistently the formal provisions on Buddhism and the Buddhist examinations as legislated in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*. The *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* was intended to establish the legal foundations for the state and thus supersede the legal codes in place over the first decades of the Chosŏn dynasty. Whether by accident or design, the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* is the dynasty's founding legal text for bibliographical purposes, not simply because it was meant to replace earlier legal texts but because those earlier legal texts are no longer extant.

The *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* provides the clearest picture of how a system of provisions regulating Buddhism might have functioned. But as is the case with so much dealing with the legal status of Buddhism and clerics over the course of the Chosŏn dynasty, the situation is marked by vexing questions. With respect to Buddhist examinations as broadly construed for reasons seen below, the most important question is how the provisions on Buddhism in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* generated opposition long before the text was finalized in 1484. The details of what happened are impossible to reconstruct at a granular level, but the general outline is sufficiently clear and centers on the momentary interruption of the anti-Buddhist program during the reign of the devout Buddhist, King Sejo 世祖 (r. 1455–1468).

Questions of Ability: A Dispute over Testing

Major work on the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* was undertaken during Sejo's reign, and it contained provisions to legitimize Buddhism and keep it linked with the structures of the state. Above all else, the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* granted the Buddhist institution and its clerics explicit legal recognition through provisions on clerical licensing and Buddhist examinations. But with Sejo's death, officials were eager to push ahead with their anti-Buddhist program. The result was a confrontation in 1469 between a monk, Sinmi 信眉 (fl. mid-to-late fifteenth century), and Sejo's successor, King Yejong 睿宗 (r. 1468–1469).

The conflict revolved around methods of testing the abilities of monks, and insofar as the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* had not yet been finalized, we can infer that there

8 For example, see also *T'aejo sillok* 6/4/25#2 (1397).
9 *Sukchong sillok* 1/5/13#1 (1675).

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was a push at Yejong's court to revise the provisions on Buddhist examinations. As found in the finalized version of the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*, to which I turn below, these examination provisions required monks to recite or chant specified Buddhist sutras and texts. The alternative was to require monks to explain Buddhist sutras. This alternative approach, pondered at Yejong's court, aimed at identifying those who ought to be laicized to reduce the number of monks. Sinmi was alarmed when he got wind of this plan and privately wrote to Yejong.[10] Sinmi was to all appearances highly educated and intellectually capable, and over the course of Sejo's reign, he had enjoyed access to the court and royal favor. He understood the inherent dangers in the proposal that monks demonstrate their intellectual capacity – and thus fitness to be monks – by orally expounding Buddhist texts. He therefore explained to Yejong that very few monks could pass any such examination.

It appears that Sinmi knew that what was under discussion at the court contradicted the provisions on Buddhism that Sejo had planned to include in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*. Yejong was furious that Sinmi was so bold as to write to him personally. But the bigger problem was that Sinmi demonstrated that knew about court deliberations. The result was a charade in which Sinmi was envisioned as some scallywag eavesdropping on matters of state. In fact, there were two obvious sources for his knowledge of what was afoot: either King Sejong's older brother and King Sejo's uncle, Prince Hyoryŏng 孝寧大君 (1396–1486), or Sinmi's brother, the official Kim Suon 金守溫 (1410–1481). Prince Hyoryŏng was an unapologetic adherent of Buddhism as was Kim Suon, and both had, along with Sinmi, participated in the Buddhist resurgence at Sejo's court. But whatever the case, Sinmi was sticking his nose into court business and was placed under house arrest.

Sinmi's letter provides additional evidence for the likelihood that, as suggested earlier, there was no functioning Buddhist examination system in the aftermath of the dynastic transition. Moreover, it suggests that the very idea of examinations was fundamentally muddled, with no clear distinction between examining those who claimed to be clerics (in effect, affirming their status) and examining those who wished to become clerics (in effect, granting them permission to do so). Support for this conclusion is found in a complaint at court a decade later. It named two monks who were part of a coterie of clerics connected with Sejo and Sinmi. The complaint focused on how one of the monks had taken the tonsure without a license and how he had been given permission to do so by the other monk.[11] The point of specific interest is that the underlying legal reasoning in the complaint is largely coherent when read against some of the provisions in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* which was then incomplete, but the complaint contained no mention of examinations. The focus was solely on licensing and tonsure. (I will return to this question.)

10 *Yejong sillok* 1/6/27#5 (1469).

11 *Sŏngjong sillok* 10/4/4#3 (1479); also, Sim Kyŏngho, *Kim Sisŭp p'yŏngjŏn* (Seoul 2003), pp. 427–428.

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The conflict between Sinmi and Yejong highlights how the provisions on the Buddhist examinations in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* were politicized even before the entire work was completed and formally issued. Such difficulties became more and more obvious over the coming years. This is not surprising. The *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* marked the first real attempt to create a framework for the implementation of exams and other provisions to oversee the Buddhist institution. This framework was surely conceptualized by Sejo to strengthen Buddhism in the face of the relentless attacks that had begun at the start of the dynasty.

Buddhist Provisions in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*

The central feature of the provisions on Buddhism in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* was the requirement of two levels of examination.[12] These examinations, moreover, were organized around the basic institutional structure of Buddhism that had been mandated by the government in the early decades of the dynasty, when the number of recognized Buddhist sects or schools was progressively reduced to the two schools of Sŏn 禪 (Meditation) and Kyo 教 (Doctrine). This implicit but significant aspect of the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* requires comment. The essential point is that the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* was not exhaustive. To make fuller sense of things, it is often necessary to examine the court documents. In this instance, the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* assumed the division of Buddhism into two schools but omitted orders dealing with that division and nomenclature.

The first set of provisions, under the heading "licensing clerics" (*tosŭng* 度僧), treated prospective Sŏn and Kyo monks alike and required that they be examined on the *Heart Sutra* (*Sim kyŏng* 心經), the *Diamond Sutra* (*Kŭmgang kyŏng* 金剛經), and a collection of what appears to have been incantations but which is otherwise unknown (*Saltalt'a* 薩怛陁). This initial examination required recitation of the mandated texts, and after taking the exam, the prospective monk was to inform the relevant authorities who would, in turn, inform the king. The prospective monk was then required to pay the government a fee to compensate for lost military labor and taxes, and after doing so, he would receive his license and thus legal recognition of his status as a monk. It is obvious that lost labor was the most crucial consideration; additional provisions emphasized that it was a crime to issue and receive licenses without payment made to the government.

The second level of examination is what seems to be typically meant by the term *sŭnggwa* or clerical examination in the secondary scholarship, and it was the second item under licensing. It stipulated that examinations were to be held every three years for the Sŏn and Kyo schools. The Sŏn school was supposed to administer examinations on the *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp Published in the Jingde Era* (*Kyŏngdŏk chŏndŭng nok* 景德傳燈錄) and the *Compilation of Examinations of and Verses on Ancient Precedents* (*Sŏnmun yŏmsong chip* 禪門拈頌集). The Kyo school was supposed to administer examinations on the *Flower Garland Sutra* (*Hwaŏm kyŏng* 華嚴經)

12 Yun Kugil (trans.), [*Sinp'yŏn*] *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* (Seoul 2005), pp. 264–266.

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and another text dealing with the *Flower Garland Sutra* entitled the *Discourse on the Ten Stages* (*Sipchi non* 十地論; also known as the *Sipchi kyŏng non* 十地經論).[13]

Since the legal code provided no additional information on the procedures for these triennial examinations, it appears that they were to follow the oral format of the examinations for clerical licensing. However, it was explicit on the allowable numbers of examination passers. The Sŏn and Kyo schools were each allowed to select thirty monks, so that every three years a total of sixty monks would receive recognition of their abilities. There are a variety of perplexing questions on the relationship between the first and second examinations. But it is reasonable to conclude that the second round of examinations was meant to create a cadre of well-trained monks, whose abilities were recognized by their peers and the state and who would then take leadership positions in the Buddhist institution.

The overall logic comes into sharper focus in the subsequent provisions dealing with the management of monasteries, hermitages, and the like. The third set of provisions under licensing gave monks a role in selecting their own abbots, albeit with government oversight. Monks had to make a shortlist of candidates and inform the government, which made the final decision, it seems, after vetting the prospective abbots. In turn, the abbots were to be replaced every thirty months. Here, as above, there was concern over criminality, and bad abbots and those who supported them were alike to be considered criminals. The crime of chief concern was sexual misconduct (and specifically, we can infer, sex with women), but there was one exception: mismanagement of Buddhist property. The fourth and final provision under licensing emphasized that abbots were personally responsible for ensuring that all monastic property was kept safe and handed over intact to their successors. Property was the central issue in the subsequent regulations under the catch-all heading "monasteries and temples" (*sasa* 寺社). This term appears to have been used in the most expansive sense to include everything from full-fledged monasteries to hermitages and prayer halls. All new construction was forbidden. Only the refurbishment of existing properties was allowable, but that was contingent on informing the proper authorities, which included, in the last instance, the king himself.

Through the provisions on licensing, examinations, monastery management, and property, the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* granted Buddhist monks recognition as a legal category and established a framework for an ongoing relationship between the Buddhist institution and the state. Although the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* echoed elements from earlier discussions about Buddhism at court – most notably, in the provisions surrounding clerical licenses and the division of Buddhism into the two schools of Meditation and Doctrine (i.e., Sŏn and Kyo) – it reversed the general thrust of numerous earlier ad hoc promulgations that had aimed to weaken the Buddhist institution, quite often with confusing results. One particularly glaring example con-

13 Information on these texts is based on A. Charles Muller (ed). *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, http://buddhism-dict.net/ddb. Edition of 2023/5/31.

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nected to the question of examinations and clerical licensing is how the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* flatly contradicted a tendency that was first articulated in an early decree that had forbidden contacts between monks and officials.[14] To be sure, that decree appears to have been largely concerned with friendly relations between monks and officials, but it also foreshadowed broader attempts to weaken Buddhism by alienating monks from officials and kings.

Looming tensions over the provisions on Buddhism in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* were evident in the events surrounding Sinmi and Yejong as described earlier. But such tensions became a recurring theme at the court of King Sŏngjong 成宗 (r. 1469–1494). Officials were riled over the provisions on Buddhism precisely because those provisions created a framework for Buddhism's continued existence, whereas Sŏngjong wanted to impose a moratorium on clerical licensing until it was certain that the military had sufficient strength. His critics were dissatisfied with his plan because it left open the possibility of granting licenses at some point in the future. The result was a running battle between Sŏngjong and his officials that intensified toward the end of his reign, coinciding with completion of the *Taejŏn Songnok* 大典續錄 (Continuation of the Legal Code).[15]

How this unfolded is too complex to be addressed here. But it is necessary to emphasize that in the following years, officials insisted that Sŏngjong had effectively abolished Buddhism by abolishing clerical licenses. They had, moreover, a legal basis for this claim in the *Taejŏn Songnok*, which was promulgated in 1492. As discussed later, the *Taejŏn songnok* banned clerical licenses and was interpreted as an outright withdrawal of legal recognition of Buddhism, and this appears to have spurred officials to deal with monks harshly in a way that Sŏngjong had feared and had sought to prevent.

The officials were nonetheless unhappy and agitated for greater clarity. The triennial examination system therefore came under attack even as monks were forcibly laicized and dragooned into the military. Unlike clerical licenses, the triennial examination system had not been explicitly abolished. This was irksome because it meant that legal recognition for Buddhism had not been completely withdrawn. That, in turn, signaled the potential for a Buddhist resurgence. Efforts to bring the triennial examinations to an end thus gathered pace at the end of the fifteenth century.[16]

Implementing the Clerical Examinations

Based on the limited references to the "great selection" (*taesŏn* 大選; a term referring to the triennial clerical examinations), it appears that the clerical examinations were held in accordance with the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* from roughly the middle of the

14 *T'aejo sillok* 1/9/24#1 (1392).
15 *Sŏngjong sillok* 23/2/17#2 (1492).
16 E.g., see *Yŏnsan'gun sillok* 3/7/1#2 (1497); *Yŏnsan'gun sillok* 3/8/2#1 (1497); *Yŏnsan'gun sillok* 8/8/12#1 (1502).

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1470s until around 1504, although examinations appear to have been conducted on an ad hoc basis earlier.[17] The abolition of clerical licenses and subsequent halting of the triennial examinations poses a conundrum that requires comment because it is directly related to the events in 1550, when we finally see the implementation of the clerical examinations with some measure of clarity.

On the one hand, an account by the official Sŏng Hyŏn 成俔 (1439–1504) discussed the scourge of Buddhism in Korean history before praising Sŏngjong's commitment to Confucian virtue and intolerance for Buddhism. According to Sŏng Hyŏn, Sŏngjong's strict enforcement of the prohibition on issuing clerical licenses had proven to be effective in conjunction with the activities of local officials in apprehending and forcibly laicizing monks. The result, Sŏng Hyŏn exulted, was that "monasteries within and without [the capital] were all empty" (中外寺刹皆空). Sŏng Hyŏn's estimation of these achievements was buttressed by his insistence that during Sŏngjong's reign, the elite began to adhere to proper Confucian ritual practices and that only the ignorant lower classes had not fully abandoned Buddhist practices – and even then, they were hampered due to a lack of monks. It was that situation that had prompted his emphasis on how the monasteries were all empty.[18] On the other hand, the dominant theme in the court documents in the early sixteenth century is frustration over the fact that monks were not decreasing in number, and that frustration put the question of the clerical examinations under scrutiny. Moreover, earlier orders were repeated over the following decades, and by 1528, it was obvious that young monks were necessarily flouting the law because there was no way for them to have clerical licenses.[19]

The question is whether the policies implemented at Sŏngjong's court were effective, as Sŏng Hyŏn had claimed, or whether he was presenting an ideal as reality; after all, he had served at Sŏngjong's court and had a vested interest in the matter. On balance, there is no compelling reason to dismiss Sŏng Hyŏn's description. But if so, then why the need for so many protracted and repetitive discussions at court over the following decades? The most convincing (if not the only) explanation is that the refusal to hold the triennial examinations proved to be counterproductive because there were no longer any high-ranking clerics to oversee state policies on Buddhism. Overall, this fits well with Sŏng Hyŏn's dates and what followed over the first few decades of the sixteenth century. In effect, we can infer that Sŏng Hyŏn accurately described the situation that prevailed at the end of Sŏngjong's reign and that contrary to officials' expectations, the situation worsened after they stopped the triennial examinations around 1504.

One thing is certain, however. Sŏng Hyŏn's confident pronouncements were premature. The problems that followed the end of clerical licensing and examina-

17 *Sŏngjong sillok* 8/3/4#3 (1477); *Yŏnsan'gun sillok* 9/4/28#1 (1503); Mun Sangnyŏn, "Chosŏn ŭi sŭnggwa, sŏnsi e taehan koch'al", *Chŏngt'ohak yŏn'gu* 33 (June 2020): esp. pp. 132–135, 137.

18 Sŏng Hyŏn, *Yongjae Ch'onghwa,* vol. 1, ca. 1504.

19 Mun Sangnyŏn, "Chosŏn ŭi sŭnggwa, sŏnsi e taehan koch'al", p. 135.

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tions led in 1550 to the formal reestablishment of the Buddhist institution and the provisions to oversee it as outlined in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*. By that point, it was obvious that the anti-Buddhist fervor that dominated among the court officials was proving to be counterproductive. By hook or by crook, they had managed to strip away legal recognition of Buddhism and monks. But the rejection of the policies in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* had led to an increasing number of monks. That increase, in turn, had serious consequences because these monks did not undertake labor or military service, nor had they paid for their licenses. By abandoning the provisions on Buddhism in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*, the anti-Buddhist officials had created an incentive for men to become monks. The result was a loss of tax revenue and weakened national defense that could no longer be ignored when King Myŏngjong 明宗 (r. 1545–1567) took the throne.

It appears that the order to reestablish institutional Buddhism in legal terms, recognized by the government, reflected the wishes of Myŏngjong's mother, Queen Munjŏng 文定王后 (1501–1565), a devoted Buddhist, who acted as regent when he took the throne. However, Queen Munjŏng's Buddhist sympathies were not the sole consideration. The legal reestablishment of Buddhism was framed as an attempt to fix the economic and military problems deriving from the unrestrained growth in monks.[20] This practical need to reestablish Buddhism and the relevant provisions to oversee it is especially intriguing when we consider two points.

First, the various pieces of legislation on Buddhism and the discussions at court had created administrative confusion as suggested earlier. This much was apparent in the protracted discussions over Buddhism at Sŏngjong's court, and legislative ambiguities remained a problem in the coming years. The fundamental difficulty was that codified laws could not keep pace with various ad hoc provisions produced at court in discussions between kings and officials.[21] That was one critical element in the tensions between Sŏngjong and his officials. Although we have insufficient information on the relationship between the decision of policies at court and their enactment throughout the country, we can infer that local officials were themselves confused. Even so, the dominant position at court was that the Buddhist institution had been abolished, if only implicitly, due to the ending of the clerical licensing and examination systems. The assumption that Buddhism indeed had been abolished was inherent in the 1550 order to reestablish it.

Second, we can infer that Queen Munjŏng was already friendly with the monk Pou 普雨 (1509–1565) prior to the legal reestablishment of Buddhism in 1500.[22] Given the crucial role that Pou played in reestablishing Buddhism as a legally-recognized institution over the next fifteen years, it is safe to assume, at the very least, that Pou had some influence over the decision. But that probably does not go far enough. The rationale for the 1550 reestablishment of Buddhism highlighted the

20 *Myŏngjong sillok* 5/12/15#2 (1550).
21 E.g., *Chungjong sillok* 4/9/27#1 (1509) and *Sŏngjong sillok* 1/3/6#5 (1470).
22 *Myŏngjong sillok* 4/9/20#1 (1549).

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danger to the state – economic and military – posed by the unrestrained increase in monks. It was, on the face of it, a sober political analysis. But the rejection of the provisions on Buddhism contained in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* starting at the end of the fifteenth century had, in fact, endangered both the state and institutional Buddhism and its monks by withdrawing legal recognition and government oversight of Buddhist clerics. This was not what the anti-Buddhist officials had intended. They had mistakenly thought that the state would prosper and Buddhism would cease to exist once they prohibited clerical licenses and ended the examination system.

The reimplementation of the provisions outlined in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* provided the context for the careers of two of the most famous Chosŏn monks, Hyujŏng 休靜 (1520–1604) and Yujŏng 惟政 (1544–1610). It is obvious that the clerical examinations were crucial to provide a leadership structure for the Buddhist institution. But even here, the amount of material is extremely thin. One of the clearest discussions of the clerical examinations in general is found in a complaint from 1552 that argued that too many monks were selected relative to the passing rates for other types of examinations. But the complaint is also frustratingly vague in crucial respects and appears to suggest that the licensing and triennial examinations dealt with in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* possibly had been collapsed, in extremis, into a single examination.[23] That possibility makes sense when we consider the ban on clerical licenses instituted six decades earlier. The reason is that the monks taking the examinations at that point were all necessarily unlicensed unless they were roughly seventy years old or older.

Another important consideration is the biographical records on prominent monks who subsequently took leadership positions in fighting against the Japanese during the Great East Asian War (1592–1598): Hyujŏng and Yujŏng as well as Ch'ŏyŏng 處英 (fl. late 16th century), Yŏnggyu 靈圭 (d. 1592), and Ŭiŏm 義嚴 (fl. late 16th century). Of these well-known figures, it seems that only Hyujŏng and Yujŏng had passed the examinations. Yet over the course of the war, it seems that there were, at any given moment, roughly one thousand monks involved in the fighting. Although it is impossible make perfect sense of the various ages and dates in Hyujŏng's biographical materials, it seems all but certain that he passed the clerical examination in 1552. Ten years later, in 1562, Yujŏng passed the examination and then went to study under Hyujŏng.[24] In sum, only two of the five well-known Buddhist leaders involved in fighting the Japanese seem to have passed the clerical examination, and those five were a mere fraction of the total number of monks involved. The only exception appears to be Chŏnggwan 靜觀 (1533–1608), who was at one point Hyujŏng's student. Based on an introduction to his writings composed in 1641, he appears to have passed the Buddhist examination.[25] But it seems that he

23 *Myŏngjong sillok* 7/9/2#1 (1552).
24 John Jorgensen, *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism 3: Hyujeong Selected Works* (Seoul 2012), pp. 35n7 and 39n26; *Samyŏngdang Taesa chip*, "Haeje".
25 *Chŏnggwan chip*, "Sŏ".

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was an opponent of his fellow monks' fighting against the Japanese, and reading between the lines, he seems to have had a falling out with Hyujŏng while maintaining a relationship with Yujŏng.[26]

Given the opposition to the Buddhist examinations (often called the "Sŏn examination" *sŏn'gwa* 禪科 in these records) that erupted after Myŏngjong ordered the reestablishment of Buddhism, the lack of detailed records on examination-passers seems to reflect an unwillingness to record what many deemed reprehensible.[27] But this explanation does not make sense in relation to the large body of Buddhist documents. Other monks who passed the examinations have disappeared without a trace in the historical record, and this suggests that Buddhist monks, perhaps, placed little value on the examinations. At the very least, it is striking that references to the examinations occur largely in relation to specific monks rather than any coherent attempt to trace the role or importance of the examinations in relation to Chosŏn Buddhism as a whole.

In turn, this raises two thorny questions. First, what made Hyujŏng and Yujŏng special? The fact that they had passed examinations was surely important, but so were the differences in their careers. Hyujŏng was the central character, and after passing his examination, he spent several years under the tutelage of Pou in administering the Buddhist institution. The perilousness of this work is understandable for the reasons outlined above and was ultimately made clear when Pou was murdered and the program of reestablishing Buddhism ended; by that point, Hyujŏng had resigned from his administrative positions and was thus in a safer position. Yujŏng was younger than Hyujŏng, passed the examination roughly ten years later, and then studied with Hyujŏng. Hyujŏng had insight into high level politics that few monks had, apart from Pou. Yujŏng's career – and specifically, his role with the court in his later years – suggests that his study with Hyujŏng encompassed more than Buddhist religious training. More than anything else, he was an extension of Hyujŏng, and indeed, a necessary extension when Hyujŏng's health faltered. Hyujŏng's early years in dealing with politics at court were paralleled by Yujŏng's later years doing the same.

The second question is what are we to make of the nameless monks who fought against the Japanese? Hyujŏng and Yujŏng possessed sufficient authority and charisma to organize monks to fight the Japanese. Their contribution was leadership, and again, Hyujŏng was central. For the most part, the lives of the other main leadership figures all intersected directly or indirectly with Hyujŏng. The contribution of the vast number of nameless monks, however, was in risking their lives and in violating the core Buddhist tenet that forbade the taking of life. The exception was Chŏnggwan and the monks who followed his lead, although it is

26 *Chŏnggwan chip,* "Haeje".

27 For representative examples, see *Myŏngjong sillok* 5/12/18#2 (1550); *Myŏngjong sillok* 5/12/19 #1 (1550); *Myŏngjong sillok* 5/12/21#1 (1550); and *Myŏngjong sillok* 6/1/6#3 (1551). Note that these are a mere fragment of a larger body of protests, and in many cases, the individual records note multiple complaints submitted to the throne.

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impossible to know how many there were in relation to those who fought. When all of this is considered, we can discern the difficulties faced by the Buddhist institution. Myŏngjong's provisions for reestablishing Buddhism as announced in 1550 lasted fifteen years. Most fighting-age monks would have come of age after the government's withdrawal of legal recognition of Buddhism in a process that was somewhat protracted. It began with the exile and murder of Pou in 1565 and was complete in the middle of 1566.[28] Well apart from the question of passing examinations as had Hyujŏng and Yujŏng, those monks had no legal right to be monks.

In the end, the clerical examinations were briefly reinstated as a reward for monks who killed Japanese soldiers during Great East Asian War, but even then, there was fear that people would misinterpret these rewards to mean that the king and court had changed their attitude toward Buddhism. This was not so, as King Sŏnjo 宣祖 (r. 1567–1608) explained in 1593. Faced with fears over a resurgent Buddhism, Sŏnjo emphasized that the reinstatement of the examinations was merely a temporary measure to motivate monks so that they would kill as many Japanese soldiers as possible to help secure victory. Moreover, the use of the term examinations appears quite likely to be misleading. It seems that rather than conducting actual examinations – whether for licensing or ranking (i.e., triennial) – the government deemed monks to have passed the examinations if they supplied the heads of Japanese soldiers killed in combat.[29] Subsequent revisions to the legal code became tied up in knots over the questions of examinations, licenses, and military preparedness.

Clerical Examinations after the Sixteenth Century: Provisions Without Purpose

In the aftermath of the war with Japan, monks were integrated into the military-taxation system. Discussions about monks and institutional Buddhism at court therefore often touched on military matters. Thus we find references to abbots (*chuji* 住持), monk-commandants (*ch'ongsŏp* 摠攝), monk-soldiers (*sŭnggun* 僧軍), monk-generals (*sŭngjang* 僧將), and the like.[30] The abolition of clerical licenses in this context posed difficulties. On the face of it, the central problem is clear: monks had no legal right to be monks. But the precise nature of the problems as envisioned by the court is often murky.[31] There is also one notable instance in which the "sale of clerical licenses" (*maedoch'ŏp* 賣度牒) is explicitly mentioned, and this suggests that the government itself was, however briefly, contravening its own laws in order to raise funds.[32] In addition, we can infer that monks negotiated

28 For a crucial document, see *Myŏngjong sillok* 21/7/11#2 (1566).
29 *Sŏnjo sillok* 26/3/27#7 (1593); *Sŏnjo sillok* 26/6/29#7 (1593); cf. Mun Sangnyŏn, "Myŏngjong tae sŏn'gwa pogwŏn e taehan koch'al", *Minjok munhwa yŏn'gu* 87 (May 2020): p. 155.
30 E.g., *Injo sillok* 2/7/23#1 (1624); *Injo sillok* 4/8/19#2 (1626); *Yŏngjo sillok* 5/10/26#1 (1729); and *Yŏngjo sillok* 22/12/17#1 (1746).
31 E.g., *Yŏngjo sillok* 21/5/13#1 (1745).
32 *Injo sillok* 4/8/19#2 (1626).

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with the government over how they were treated and how they participated in the military-taxation system.[33] By the mid-to-late eighteenth century, the participation of clerics in the military was sufficiently routinized that monk-soldiers were even ordered to participate in a royal ceremony.[34] By bowing as the royal procession passed, these monk-soldiers demonstrated at once their usefulness to the state and fidelity to the Chosŏn ruling house.

Nonetheless, this on-the-ground, practical situation as conveyed in the court documents sits in stark contrast to the provisions as found in various revisions to the legal code. One crucial example is the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* 大典通編 (Complete Compilation of the Legal Codes), which was completed in 1785 at the order of King Chŏngjo 正祖 (r. 1776–1800) and promulgated the following year. It was a synthetic text that at once incorporated the laws articulated in earlier versions of the legal code and contained amendments to those earlier laws. In effect, the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* was an inventory of the legal history of the Chosŏn dynasty.

At first glance, many of the provisions on Buddhism were nearly verbatim repeats of what was contained in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*. There was, however, one crucial difference in that the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* explicitly forbade the supply of clerical licenses. This specific provision originated in the debates over how best to deal with Buddhism at Sŏngjong's court. It was first articulated in a list of miscellaneous prohibitions in the *Taejŏn Songnok* 大典續錄 (Continuation of the Legal Code, 1492), which was promulgated less than a decade after the completion and implementation of the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*. The logic of the provision centered on the needs of military defense, and it emphasized that the supply of clerical licenses was forbidden while the military increased in strength.[35]

Clerical licenses were thus forbidden until the military was deemed to have sufficient strength, and the implicit understanding was that the number of soldiers would always be deemed insufficient and thus that clerical licenses were, in effect, banned in perpetuity. This provision, in turn, was repeated in subsequent legal texts including the *Ch'ŏllok T'onggo* 典錄通考 (Complete Examination of the Legal Record, 1707); the *Chŭngbo Ch'ŏllok T'onggo* 增補典錄通考 (Expanded Complete Examination of the Legal Record), which appears to have been completed in the 1740s but not issued (it exists only in manuscript form); the *Sok Taejŏn* 續大典 (Supplement to the Legal Code, 1746); the *Chŏnyul T'ongbo* 典律通補 (Complete Supplement to the Laws, 1786) which was completed the year after the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn*, but apparently not issued for implementation on a countrywide basis; and finally, the *Taejŏn Hoet'ong* (Collected Information on the Legal Code, 1865), which was,

33 *Yŏngjo sillok* 31/8/14#2 (1755).
34 *Yŏngjo sillok* 36/3/26#1 (1760).
35 *Taejŏn Songnok*, Yejŏn 禮典 (Ritual Code), *chamnyŏng* 雜令 (miscellaneous prohibitions) and *kunaek pusŏng kan* 軍額敷盛間 (while the number of soldiers grows). Bibliographical information on these texts and those discussed below is based on the overviews in the online *Chosŏn sidae pŏmnyŏng charyo* (Legal Materials from the Chosŏn Era). I cite these texts per their digitized organization.

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in essence, a supplement to the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* and the last major legal text produced during the Chosŏn dynasty.

It seems that there were possibly additional legal texts that might bear on this question. But these examples cover several centuries, and it is reasonable to conclude that they accurately trace the general trajectory of the codified policies. There are several conspicuous points. First, the *Taejŏn Songnok* criminalized those who became monks as "those who break the law" (*wibŏpcha* 違法者), and that provision was reproduced in the subsequent legal texts. (Note that the first graph is misprinted as *wŏn* 遠 in the *Taejŏn Songnok* but corrected as *wi* 違 in subsequent iterations.) However, the *Taejŏn Songnok* was marked by an internal consistency and coherence that was subsequently blunted.

The reason is that the *Taejŏn Songnok* forbade the supply of clerical licenses and therefore reasonably omitted references to the processes on clerical licensing and the triennial examinations as found in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*. After all, if it was deemed illegal to become a monk, then why include material on the initial examinations or the triennial examinations? Later legal texts were less logical in that respect. We can infer that the reason was that they were meant, in effect, to serve as a repository of Chosŏn laws and that they therefore included older, defunct provisions as a point of reference. This aspect can be illustrated through the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn*. It reproduced the provisions on Buddhism as contained in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* in relation to licensing clerics (*tosŭng* 度僧), with sections on clerical licenses (*toch'ŏp* 度牒), the triennial examinations (*sŏnsi* 選試), and the regulations surrounding the appointment and responsibilities of abbots (*chuji ch'ŏnmang* 住持薦望) and how they were to be replaced (*chuji ch'edae* 住持遞代). But the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* added an additional provision. This final provision, drawn from the *Taejŏn Songnok*, nullified the first four because it forbade the issuance of clerical licenses until such time that the military was deemed to be sufficiently strong and threatened punishment for those who broke the law (續軍額敷盛間, 勿許度僧, 違法者, 囚一族督現.)[36]

The second and related point centers on the required format for clerical licenses (*toch'ŏp sik* 度牒式) as found in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*. The *Taejŏn Songnok* was again precisely logical on this point. Since it forbade the supply of clerical licenses, it did not reproduce the format for licenses. The *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* followed a different approach that was dictated by its broad coverage of the dynasty's legal history. It therefore reproduced the format but made clear that this was a record of a past practice that was no longer in use: "format for the clerical license [revised] henceforth abolished" (度牒式 [增] 今廢).[37] The insertion of "revised" (*chŭng* 增) marked this as a legal clarification undertaken by those who had created the *Tae-*

36 *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn*, Yejŏn 禮典 (Ritual Code), *tosŭng* 度僧 (licensing monks) and *kunaek* 軍額 (number of soldiers).

37 Ibid., *yong munja sik* 用文字式 (documentary formats) and *toch'ŏp sik* 度牒式 (clerical license format).

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jŏn Tongp'yŏn, which employed abbreviations to identify specific provisions from earlier iterations of the legal code.

In sum, the ban on clerical licenses in the *Taejŏn Songnok* had removed any need for showing the format for clerical licenses as found the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*. While this ban was repeated later, it was done so in a fashion that at times lacked the clarity of the *Taejŏn Songnok*. The *Ch'ŏllok T'onggo*, for example, followed the *Taejŏn Songnok* in explicitly forbidding clerical licenses (*multosŭng* 勿度僧) and criminalizing monks (違法爲僧者), but its inclusion of material from the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* confused matters: the regulations on licensing and the triennial examinations from the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* are given at one point and then much later those regulations are nullified through the ban on clerical licenses from the *Taejŏn Songnok*. The presentation of the format for clerical licenses is even worse because it is included in a list of documentary formats that follows, at considerable length, the ban on clerical licenses. In sharp contrast, the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* explicitly marked the abrogation of clerical licenses, thus making clear that the format it reproduced was an historical relic. In this way, the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* was a culmination and clarification of earlier regulations.

Third, the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* contained a list of miscellaneous prohibitions that included bans on monks and nuns entering the capital. The wording was based on the *Sok Taejŏn* but went farther.[38] Whereas the *Sok Taejŏn* made a special exception for monks (but not nuns) entering the capital for public purposes, the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* added a revision that specifically forbade monks from entering the capital for both public and private purposes (勿論公私, 竝禁).[39] This uniform ban was reiterated in the *Taejŏn Hoet'ong* in 1865.[40] This ban had a long pedigree. It was a longstanding assumption that monks were banned from entering the capital.[41] The specific point of interest here is the well-known lifting of the ban on clerics entering the capital in 1895 that is credited to the intervention of a Japanese monk, Sano Zenrei 佐野 前励 (1859–1912).[42] The decision to lift the ban appears to have been a response to this provision in the *Taejŏn Hoet'ong*, although the discussion at court referred to the provision simply as a "longstanding prohibition" (*kugŭm* 舊禁).[43]

Finally, there is the question of the additional provisions on Buddhism in the various legal texts. It is in relation to these that we can discern most clearly the in-

38 *Sok Taejŏn*, Hyŏngjŏn 刑典 (Code of Punishments), *kŭmje* 禁制 (prohibitions) and *pun'gyŏng-ja umasado-ja* 奔競者牛馬私屠者 (office-seekers and those who slaughter oxen and horses without official approval).

39 *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn*, Hyŏngjŏn 刑典 (Code of Punishments), *kŭmje* 禁制 (prohibitions) and *pun'gyŏng-ja umasado-ja* 奔競者牛馬私屠者 (office-seekers and those who slaughter oxen and horses without official approval); and cf. Yun Kugil, [*Sinp'yŏn*] *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*, p. 434.

40 *Taejŏn Hoet'ong*, Hyŏngjŏn 刑典 (Code of Punishments), *kŭmje* 禁制 (prohibitions) and *pun'gyŏng umasado-ja* 奔競牛馬私屠者 [sic] (those who seek office and slaughter oxen and horses without official approval).

41 E.g., see *Chungjong sillok* 34/5/27#1 (1539).

42 Im Hyebong, *Pulgyosa 100 changmyŏn* (Seoul 1994), pp. 277–278.

43 *Kojong sillok* 32/3/29#2 (1895).

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coherence of the various policies dealing with Buddhism. The fundamental problem was the contradiction between the explicit ban on clerical licenses and implicit nullification of the triennial examinations, on the one hand, and the additional provisions dealing with Buddhism, on the other.

Following the format of the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*, the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* forbade the construction of new monasteries and hermitages, allowing only for reconstruction or refurbishment of existing properties with proper notification from the local level to the Sŏn and Kyo schools, through the Board of Rites, and finally to the king himself. But the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* contained two additional provisions given as amendments (*chŭng* 增). The first strictly forbade the construction of monasteries near royal tombs, with the threat of punishment for officials who failed to stop such construction. The *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* noted that this law had been issued in forty-sixth year of King Yŏngjo's reign, which is to say, in 1770. Although the court documents do not contain an edict on the matter from the given year, they contain other records from Yŏngjo's reign that contextualize the provision.[44]

This amendment was bolstered by another, which carried a note indicating that it was issued in 1776. The source of this amendment can be positively identified in the dynastic annals and King Chŏngjo's hearty agreement in 1776 that the prayer temples (*wŏndang* 願堂) scattered through the country were an abomination.[45] The *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* specified that all prayer temples in government offices and royal palaces in the capital were to be abolished, and to make the order as clear as possible, it emphasized that prayer temples "already built are to be demolished and those not yet constructed are strictly forbidden" (已建者, 撤毁, 未建者, 嚴禁).[46]

These two dates in the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* indicate the need to update the legal code. But they also hint at the ineffectualness of the provisions on Buddhism. This ineffectualness is more marked in the 1776 amendment since it was limited to prayer temples in government offices and royal palaces in the capital – an apparent acceptance of the reality that any such order could not be readily implemented anywhere else. In this respect, the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* straddled the divide between ideals and reality. These ideals were also signaled by what was omitted. One such omission was the question of monk-soldiers, something that had occurred in conjunction with the notion of extracting labor and taxes from clerics even prior to the end of the Great East Asian War.[47] In the aftermath of the war with Japan and then the Manchu invasions several decades later, monk-soldiers were commonplace as indicated in their attendance at the royal procession as cited earlier. The *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn*, however, ignored this question.

44 E.g., see *Yŏngjo sillok* 31/4/18#6 (1755); *Yŏngjo sillok* 44/8/17#1 (1768).

45 *Chŏngjo sillok* chŭgwinyŏn/6/14#3 (1776).

46 *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn*, Yejŏn 禮典 (Ritual Code), *sasa* 寺社 (monasteries and temples) and *wŏndang* 願堂 (prayer temples).

47 I.e., also referred to by the terms "laboring clerics" (*yŏksŭng* 役僧) and "clerical labor" (*sŭngyŏk* 僧役); e.g., see *Myŏngjong sillok* 16/10/30#3 (1561).

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By contrast, the *Chŏnyul T'ongbo*, prepared at nearly the same time as the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn*, referred to monks' involvement in the military in a section dealing with the testing of soldiers' abilities.[48] It is obvious that the testing in question was military, not religious, in nature. But as noted earlier, the *Chŏnyul T'ongbo* does not appear to have been issued. The omission of any mention of monk-soldiers in the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* is even more striking considering the court documents which record Chŏngjo's references to monks' contemporary role in military labor, his understanding of how that role had taken shape after the Japanese invasions, and his eagerness to see the system strengthened.[49] Neglect of this question was partly ameliorated decades later with the *Yukchŏn Chorye* 六典條例 (Ordinances of the Six Codes, 1867). It contained a section devoted to the Monks' Encampment (Ch'iyŏng 緇營), which was the name given to the monk-soldiers stationed at the Pukhan Mountain Fortress (Pukhan Sansŏng 北漢山城).[50]

Even so, there is a striking mismatch between the various legal texts and the discussions recorded in the court documents. A large part of the problem as outlined above was that the ban on the supply of clerical licenses and end of the triennial examination system had signaled the government's withdrawal of its legal recognition of Buddhism. These structures were revived at the court of King Myŏngjong for fifteen years but then revoked, only to be revived again momentarily in an ad hoc fashion several decades later as an enticement for monks to join the fight against the Japanese. Throughout all of this, however, no formal change was made to the 1492 provision banning clerical licenses. Clerical examinations for the purposes of licensing and the triennial examinations signaled governmental recognition of Buddhism and therefore were abandoned.

At the same time, the legal codes highlighted their own ineffectualness. The overarching impression – not altogether surprising – is an indifference toward Buddhism even after monks were integrated into the military. Reality was an uncomfortable reminder of successive policies that had failed to kill off Buddhism. This indifference appears in a stark fashion in the *Ch'ugwan T'onggo* 春官通考 (Compendium of the Ministry of Rites), which was prepared at the order of Chŏngjo at roughly the same time that the *Taejŏn Tongp'yŏn* and *Chŏnyul T'ongbo* were compiled. In a section dealing with shrines located in Kyŏngsang Province, the compilers confused Hyujŏng and Yujŏng, identifying Samyŏngdang as Hyujŏng's penname (休靜號四溟堂) and Sŏsan as Yujŏng's penname (惟政號西山).[51]

48 *Chŏnyul T'ongbo*, Pyŏngjŏn 兵典 (Military Code), *sich'wi* 試取 (testing) and *kagyŏngmun* 各營門 (garrisons).

49 *Chŏngjo sillok* 3/8/3#1 (1779); *Chŏngjo sillok* 3/8/8#1 (1779).

50 *Yukchŏn Chorye*, Pyŏngjŏn 兵典 (Military Code), *chongyungch'ŏng* 摠戎廳 (chongyungch'ŏng [i.e., military outpost], *pu: Pukhan Sansŏng* 附: 北漢山城 (Supplement: Pukhan Mountain Fortress) and *Ch'iyŏng* 緇營 (Monks' Encampment).

51 *Ch'ugwan T'onggo,* vol. 38, *killye* 吉禮 (rituals), *wŏnsa* 院祠 (temples and shrines), and *Kyŏngsang-do* 慶尙道 (Kyŏngsang Province).

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It was, of course, the opposite. As discussed earlier, those two monks were distinguished figures, not simply as passers of the triennial examinations but also as leaders of the monks who fought against the Japanese. Moreover, the combination of passing the examinations and leadership in the fight against Japan makes them unique in the historical record. For that reason alone, this confusion is startling. But when we remember that both Hyujŏng and Yujŏng had significant dealings with the court over the course of their careers, this confusion is even more remarkable. It suggests that they were an unwanted reminder of a failure that was preferable to ignore.

Conclusion

Buddhism and clerical status were politicized in the early decades of the Chosŏn dynasty through policies meant to weaken the Buddhist institution and minimize the influence of clerics. The origins of this politicization are found in the relationship between the state and Buddhism during the Koryŏ. Chosŏn's officials were eager to avoid what they saw as Koryŏ's mistakes by limiting Buddhist influence and imposing controls over who was eligible to become a cleric and under what circumstances. The effectiveness of these rules is questionable, as is their precise relationship to Koryŏ practices. The nature of those rules and their implementation must be reconstructed from dynastic records because the earliest legal codes are no longer extant.

The measures against Buddhism grew more and more severe over the early decades of the Chosŏn. It is therefore ironic that the earliest extant legal code, the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*, pushed against the general drift of earlier policies as recorded in the dynastic records. It carved out a space for Buddhism in legal terms, and in doing so, it granted institutional Buddhism and its clerics legal recognition through examinations: licensing examinations in the first instance and then triennial examinations, which could produce a cadre of elite monks to manage the operations of the Buddhist institution with government oversight. In this respect, the provisions on the examinations linked Buddhism and the government. But this link did something else. It hinted at a continuation or recommencement of the fundamental Koryŏ idea of mutual support between Buddhism and the state, something that terrified Chosŏn officials.

The likelihood that Sejo envisioned the Buddhist policies in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* to safeguard Buddhism is strongly supported by the early attempts to modify those policies. This dissatisfaction was central to the plan at Yejong's court to alter the regulations for examinations, which in turn led to the confrontation between Yejong and the monk Sinmi. In the short term, the procedures as outlined in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* – requiring recitation of Buddhist texts rather than their explication, as considered by Yejong – came into effect. How widely these were implemented is uncertain, but they obviously were deemed to be a matter of law. We know this because the *Taejŏn Songnok* banned clerical licensing in 1492, thus stripping away the foundation for recognition of the Buddhist institution.

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With that change, the question of the licensing examination became irrelevant. The triennial examination was a different matter, and it soon came under scrutiny. Nonetheless, the dynastic records and subsequent legal texts substantiate the interpretation that clerical licensing was the crucial point of attack and that the triennial examination was ultimately rendered irrelevant due to the ban on clerical licensing. It was possible in principle to maintain clerical licensing without the triennial examination, but the reverse was impossible. However, the attacks on both licensing and the triennial examination were reflections of the same assumption that Buddhism could not survive without legal recognition.

Over several decades from the late fifteenth century, Sŏng Hyŏn's triumphant view that Buddhism had finally been defeated gave way to the realization Buddhism could survive, albeit outside the bounds of any legal oversight. The results were dire, leading to the royal order in 1550 to restore legal recognition of Buddhism by reinstating the provisions on the Buddhist examinations in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn*. The importance of this moment cannot be overstated. On the one hand, the order made explicit the understanding that the 1492 ban on clerical licensing was tantamount to a ban on institutional Buddhism. On the other hand, the order made explicit how the attempt to crush Buddhism had not only failed but had led to economic and military weakness for the state. Even so, the solution was deemed unacceptable, and after fifteen years, the anti-Buddhist officials reaffirmed the position that institutional Buddhism and its clerics were wholly incompatible with the Chosŏn dynasty. Throughout all of this, there were no apparent changes to the legal texts. The 1550 order to restore legal recognition to Buddhism reverted to the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* and thus overrode the *Taejŏn Songnok*, but fifteen years later, the primacy of the *Taejŏn Songnok* was reimposed. In effect, one core issue was how the existing texts were used and supplemented by directives from the court.

The invasion by Japan and the ensuing Great East Asian war therefore posed a thorny political and legal problem for both the government and Buddhist clerics who, as a matter of law, had no right to be clerics. In the event, the value of the principles outlined in the *Kyŏngguk Taejŏn* is suggested by the fact that two of the most important Buddhist figures in the fight against Japan were, in part at least, products of the examinations as reinstated in 1550. The significance of this should not be exaggerated. As suggested earlier, there is little indication that monks themselves placed much value on the examinations. At the same time, success in the examinations helps to explain Hyujŏng's and Yujŏng's influence over other monks. Given the paltry evidence we have for the examinations and the complex events over the second half of the sixteenth century, it is possible that the narrow timespan for the implementation of the triennial examinations (fifteen years at most) in conjunction with the passage of time (that is, the three decades between the reversion to the anti-Buddhist policy embedded in the *Taejŏn Songok* and the Great East Asian War) simply meant that there were few exam-passers alive when the war broke out.

There are, however, no difficulties in accounting for the inattention to the Buddhist examinations following the end of the war. Examinations were no longer a

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consideration. The ban on clerical licenses meant that there was no need for either licensing or triennial examinations. This was in one respect a maintenance of the policy articulated in the *Taejŏn Songok*. But the Great East Asian War had led to the modification of that policy in practice but not legislation. Although monks could not obtain licenses and thus had no official governmental approval of their status as monks, they participated in the military-taxation system. It was that participation that gave them de facto – not de jure – recognition of their status as monks.

This gap between reality and legislation is striking. On the one hand, the court documents record the participation of monks in the military system after the end of the Great East Asian War – an issue in which the government had an understandable interest. On the other hand, various revisions to the legal code were largely silent on the issue until the final decades of the dynasty. In this respect, the various iterations of the legal code were a monument both to the ideal of a dynastic order free of Buddhism and to the failure of that ideal in practice. The anti-Buddhist officialdom politicized the Buddhist examination system at a great cost to the dynasty it promised to protect.

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Fig. 7: Detail from a copy of the painting *Puksae sŏnŭn to* 北塞宣恩圖 (The King's Blessing extends to the North) by Han Sigak 韓時覺 (1621–1691?) showing military examinations held in the town of Kilju in Hamgyŏng Province in the year 1664

Some Aspects of the Assessment and Evaluation of Military Skills and Knowledge in Chosŏn Korea

Felix Siegmund

Introduction

While the examination systems for civil and military officials are well-known and well-researched, and while there is also some very good research on the military service examination (*mu'gwa* 武科), there is very little research on the practical assessment of knowledge in the Chosŏn military. In fact, there is not a single research paper dealing with this topic and the information that can be found in the research literature, while very useful, is of a more or less accidental nature. This article describes some aspects of the practical assessment of knowledge in the Chosŏn military.

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While some parts of these questions, especially that of the character of practical examination in the military, have been popular topics with military historians and re-enactors in South Korea, such as Ch'oe Hyŏngguk, their work is generally unknown outside of those circles.[1] Most of these studies have been isolated and with very specific research interests and the results, useful as they are, lack contextualization. It is a great comfort in this situation, that studies of the military in Chosŏn Korea can rely on a wealth of excellent materials.[2]

This article is an attempt to put together the findings of previous studies and to then add some additional research of my own, to gain as much insight as possible at this stage into the evaluation and assessment of skill and practical knowledge in the Chosŏn military. Most of the cases that I investigate in this article are about evaluation processes in state institutions, which do have an official character. These tests and methods of knowledge assessment existed independently of the state examinations and are only loosely related to them.

Since there is little previous work on this topic, I will not be able to offer a conclusive narrative and not much in terms of full-fledged argumentation. Instead, I would like to emphasize the preliminary character of my findings and interpretations and give an overview of some aspects of the assessment and evaluation of knowledge and skills in the military.

The Military State Examination System

The beginnings of Military examinations date back to 8th-century Tang China, possibly even to times as early as the Chinese Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE).[3] The system of military examinations was then introduced to Korea in the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), but was only really put into practice the period from 1109 to 1133. Military examinations were then again installed and held continuously in the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). The examinations were only abolished during the great modernization reforms in 1894, when all the state examination systems were abolished and replaced by a reformed public service system[4]

1 For examples, see the popular works on military techniques by Ch'oe Hyŏngguk, "Chosŏn sidae ch'oego ŭi t'ŭksu pudae 'Changyongyŏng'", *Inmul kwa sasang* 12 (2007), pp. 192–203; and Ch'oe Hyŏngguk, *Pyŏngsŏ. Chosŏn ŭl mal-hada. Hollan kwa chŏhang ŭi chosŏnsa* (Seoul 2018).

2 Including such indispensable resources as the outstanding work on the history of military literature by Chŏng Haeŭn. See Chŏng Haeŭn, *Han'guk chŏnt'ong pyŏngsŏ ŭi ihae* (Seoul 2004); and Chŏng Haeŭn, *Han'guk chŏnt'ong pyŏngsŏ ŭi ihae II* (Seoul 2008).

3 See Zhang Yongjian, "Wuke de cunfei yu junshi jiaoyu de jindaihua", *Fudan xuabao shehui kexue ban* 1 (1988): pp. 103–108.

4 The best English language studies of military service examinations and their social relevance in Chosŏn Korea are Eugene Y. Park, *Between Dreams and Reality: The Military Examination in Late Chosŏn Korea, 1600–1894* (Cambridge Mass. 2007); and Eugene Y. Park, "Military Examinations in Late Chosŏn, Elite Substratification and Non-Elite Accommodation", *Korean Studies* 25 (2001), pp. 1–50.

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The goal of the state examinations was the recruitment of competent military officials. To achieve this goal, a system of examinations was used, aimed to bring knowledgeable and able personnel into the right positions.

The system of the official military examination is well-documented in documents such as the *Kwansŏ musa sich'wi pang* 關西武士試取榜 (Register of the Military Examination in Kwansŏ [P'yŏngan Province]) from 1792 (16th year of the reign of King Chŏngjo 正祖 [r. 1776–1800]). That particular document lists in detail the examination of candidates from P'yŏng'an province, which led to 177 examination-passers being recruited.[5]

The Lesser Military Examinations

In addition to and separate from the military examination system, there was a system of less prominent and less official evaluations of military skills, which tested military skills after soldiers had already been enlisted. These procedures to not have a uniform name in the sources and do not seem to have been understood as a formal system. Unfortunately, there is very little in the usual sources and it has been surprisingly difficult to piece together some useful information from various sources. In addition, my limited approach has yielded little in terms of records or reports on actual practice. Thus, most of what I describe here is based on theoretical texts, rather than on practical records. This, naturally, means that the character of these findings is preliminary and based on sources of doubtful reliability. This lack of reliability of the examination system and its records has been a major problem of the Choson state administration and it is an ongoing topic in the sources, as we will see.

Skill examinations in the military did take place both on highly formalized levels, as in the military examinations and in regulated practical examinations during training, and on an informal level, which is described in some of the military manuals, in dynastic records and in the institutional records.

Much of the transfer of knowledge and skills would have been conducted orally and during practical exercises and is, for this reason, not well-represented in the sources. In some cases, however, soldiers were trained and examined based on texts, which is much more tangible as a historical source. The texts taught to soldiers were mostly instructions for weapon use and drill procedures, but they also included military regulations. Regulations were important because soldiers should know exactly what consequence their good or bad performance would have, so as to encourage efforts for good performance. They were not just an instrument of standardization, but also one of control and incentive.

The most influential figure in the development of Chosŏn military thought during and after the Imjin War is the Chinese general and military thinker Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528–1588). His work was very influential in Korea from the late 17th century on quickly becoming the dominant voice of discourse on military

5 See Na Yŏng'il, *'Mugwa ch'ongyo' yŏn'gu* (Seoul 2005).

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organizational practice.[6] In his work, he emphasized the importance of education for the soldiers, so that everyone could clearly know military regulations and discipline. According to Qi Jiguang's system, soldiers were to be seen as students and the relation between soldiers and their educators, drill masters, generals etc. should be understood as a teacher-student relation. This conception of a teacher-student relation is based on an (arguably much simplified) Confucian ideas, which is reflected in the terminology used:

> If one has not practiced to use the implements, that is as if one was bare-handed. In the correct way of teaching, it is necessary to emphasize the proper respect towards teachers in the first place. There is an old saying "If the correct way of the teacher is established, then there will be many good men."[7] As for someone who is a teacher, even though he is of a very lowly rank, when he is among the soldiers, he gets the veneration due to a master of teaching.[8]

While this is a simplified and somewhat abridged version of Confucian educational ethics, it seems clear that Qi Jiguang is emulating Confucian ideas and applies them to his military context. Applying Confucian rhetorics gives weight to his arguments by embedding them in the dominant discourse of his time and makes them more convincing.

On the other hand, the actual instruction and training of soldiers is a subject on which little is known and it is a subject that scholarship so far has little to say on. We can find some insights into the instruction of soldiers in those military texts that have *ŏnmun* translations, such as the *Chinbŏp ŏnhae* 陣法諺解 (Korean Language Explanation of the Principles of Organization) (which is an abbreviated translation of the *Pyŏnghak chinam* 兵學指南 [Compass of Military Learning], the authoritative adaption of the *Jixiao xinshu* 紀效新書 [New Treatise on Military Efficiency] in Korea) and the firearms manual *Hwap'osik ŏnhae* 火炮式諺解 (Korean Language Explanation of the Cannon Manual). While literate Koreans were trained to translate *hanmun* into a highly formalized form of the vernacular, it is not clear whether these translations were understood by illiterate listeners. Many officers were semi-literate and in need of assistance when dealing with *hanmun* and made use of vernacular translations. These could then be read out aloud and were readily understandable for the non-literate and semi-literate soldiers. The parts that are translated are weapon terminology and weapon use instructions. This must be because these were the most essential knowledge that was to be taught to illiterate soldiers, who would have to learn these words by heart.

6 Felix Siegmund, *Theorie und Praxis militärischen Wissens zwischen China und Korea im langen 17. Jahrhundert. Qi Jiguangs militärische Schriften und die nordöstliche Grenzregion* (Wiesbaden 2018), pp. 73–94; and Ch'a Munsŏp, *Chosŏn sidae kunje yŏn'gu* (Seoul 1973), pp. 159–161.

7 Many variations of this saying can be found, but the origin is unclear.

8 *Jixiao xinshu* 14, p. 123.

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Gun usage instructions are interesting because they give some insight into how actual practice was imagined. The gun songs of Chinese and Korean military manuals are a good example for this. They consist of a step-by-step instruction on operating a gun. There were gun songs for all sorts of different guns and they had to be memorized by the soldiers, and were probably chanted during training.

A recurring topic in Chinese and Korean military manuals of the 17th century and later is that of so-called gun songs (kr. *ch'ongga*, ch. *chongge* 銃歌). The term could also be translated as "gun words", but since it is likely that they were recited rhythmically or even sung – both are typical mnemotechniques – "gun song" seems right. These gun songs are short descriptions of the process of loading, firing and cleaning guns. There are different gun songs for different guns.

They date back at least to the *Wubian* 武編 (Book of Warfare) by the Ming military writer Tang Shunzhi 唐順之 (1507–1560), but the relevant source for their introduction to Korea in the context of the 17th century again seems to be Qi Jiguang's *Jixiao xinshu*. The only text by Qi Jiguang to include gun songs is the later, revised 14 *juan Jixiao xinshu*.

The Korean manual *Pyŏnghak chinam*, which can be said to be the most influential derivative of the *Jixiao xinshu*, does not include gun songs. This is probably due to the modular character of most military books of this time: The *Pyŏnghak chinam* was intended as a reference work for officials in charge of organization and training. The details of weapon use are to be found in other manuals.

The contemporary military text with the most comprehensive repertoire of gun songs is Han Hyosun's 韓孝純 (1543–1621) *Sin'gi pigyŏl* 神器秘訣 (Secret Techniques of Firearms), which was published in 1603. It has gun songs for an impressive total of eighteen gun types, even though most of them are very similar.

Interestingly, the *Sin'gi pigyŏl* also has some minimal glosses in Korean, mainly of weapon names. This is probably a means to help drill instructors with easily-understandable translations for terms that would have to be remembered by common soldiers. This would have made it easier to explain the manual during training, using standardized terminology instead of improvised terms.

There are other manuals, which are entirely in Korean or in mixed script. One such manual, the *Hwap'osik ŏnhae*, was published in 1635 and is written in a style mixing elements of written Chinese and vernacular explanations. I assume that the reason for choosing this style of writing is that it was easier to understand for semi-literate officers and drill-masters and that it was also easier to use in training, since it could be read out and would be understood by someone who was not able to read himself. This was not possible with texts in Literary Chinese.[9] Interestingly, this *Hwap'osik ŏnhae* has gun songs, but does not have a gun song for arquebuses.

9 This seems also to be true for Chinese manuals. In his writings, Qi Jiguang, who normally writes in standard Literary Chinese, switches to a written form of colloquial Chinese in the passages intended for a broader audience. See the example cited in this text (*Jixiao xinshu* 14, p. 132). For an example of moderate mixed use of literary and colloquial Chinese see *Lianbing shiji*, pp. 64–65.

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Royal guards (Nae'gŭmwi 內禁衛) were tested for their skills with the bow, both on horseback and dismounted.[10] But it is not clear whether the results of these tests were as important as the "good looks" of the soldiers, which are explicitly mentioned to be of high importance.[11]

When the Chŏngnowi 定虜衛 ("Northern Security Command") was established, 1.000 men were enlisted after successfully passing a bow-shooting examination.[12] Apparently this was quite a success, as detachments of soldiers from the Chŏngnowi were later used to fill up units that were deemed unfit for combat on their own.[13]

Weapons Skill Tests

Fighting skills were taught through drill. For the period after the Imjin War, the most influential drill-patterns were those laid out in the *Pyŏnghak chinam*. The Hullyŏn togam 訓鍊都監 (Military Training Agency), installed in 1593 with the goal of building a guard unit to act as the core of a reformed army, following the breakdown of the Korean army during the Japanese invasion, used the *Jixiao xinshu* as the principle guideline for training in the last years of the 16th century and in the early 17th century.[14] Clarifications and adaptations in the system ultimately resulted in the compilation of the *Pyŏnghak chinam*.[15]

Military drill, in our context, should be seen as a form of securing skills by constant testing. Testing is a means to control the results of the training and to ensure that soldiers have acquired the necessary skills. The idea of military drill as laid out in the manuals is such that drill should be repeated until the command words and reactions go smoothly. The focus very much is on standardized action, individual display of skills is explicitly discouraged:

> As for martial skills, one must learn the real practice of [overcoming] the enemy as shown [in training]. [This is] the real ability to fight and it will not do to learn [elaborate and useless] flowery techniques. [16]

And very similar here:

> As for comparative tests in martial skills, one must only learn the real practice of [overcoming] the enemy as shown [in training]. [This is] the real ability to fight and it will not do to learn [elaborate and useless] flowery spear etc. and other techniques, which only provide fake shows to serve the purpose of looking good in front of an audience. [17]

10 Ch'a Munsŏp, *Chosŏn sidae kunje yŏn'gu*, pp. 71–74.
11 Ibid., p. 69.
12 Ibid., p. 136.
13 Ibid., p. 151.
14 Ibid., pp. 159–161.
15 See Siegmund, *Theorie und Praxis militärischen Wissens zwischen China und Korea im langen 17. Jahrhundert*, pp. 90–93.
16 *Jixiao xinshu* 14, p. 146.
17 *Jixiao xinshu* 18, p. 91.

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This did not always work out in practice, and many soldiers were incompetent, especially in times of peace and then especially among hereditary soldiers, who were enlisted into the army with a hereditary military rank and without tests.[18] It is clear that many of the soldiers who took part in examinations were untrained and without even the basic skills that were expected for effective military service. This is very visible in a decline in the performance in archery tests after the 17th century.[19]

A very similar idea is found in the *Kihyo sinsŏ chŏlyo* 紀效新書節要 (Conspectus of the New Treatise on Military Efficiency), another Korean text derived from the *Jixiao xinshu*:

> What one sees during peace at the training grounds are people who prance around, hacking and slashing in dramatic fashion, brandishing weapons in useless forms. These things are flowery techniques that look good to the observer. But since what is needed when it comes to actually facing battle are true and earnest thrusts - how are they going to emerge victorious?
> It is like with heavy artillery. When peace days are not used for training, then how to aim at the right distance during battle and how to hit [the enemy]? If rockets are not [test] launched in peace some will be fired too high, some will drop to close. How then can effectiveness be achieved? Even if one trains unremittingly; if just one thing is not according to the model, even though one has then only wasted one's efforts and it is the same as if one had not trained at all. If the orders by gong and drum, the commands, the marching formations, the battle formations, and the fighting skills and techniques that are trained on the training grounds are all of a nature that is actually useful for fighting the enemy; and if they are learned for one day and then for another day; and if one topic is learned and then another topic is learned, this boosts the spirit [of the troops]. As one says: A man with great skills is of high spirits.
> The commands and the battlefield skills that military men practice are entirely the same as [what is used] in battle. In battle one uses exactly what one has learned. It is absolutely necessary that what is used is effective. If for a long time one passes on faulty practices and teaches useless forms, and then gives different instructions in battle, one can then train for a hundred years, but how will one be prepared for actual practice?[20]

As a side note, it is very interesting that this text, even though written in Korea, bears many traces of semi-colloquial Chinese in grammar and vocabulary. Apparently this was considered the correct style for this sort of instruction, even though very few Koreans would have received formal training in this language. It is, how-

18 Ch'a Munsŏp, *Chosŏn sidae kunje yŏn'gu*, 42f.
19 Cho Sŏnggyun, Kwak Chŏnghyŏng, "Chosŏn sidae mugwa chedo wa hwal ssogi munhwa ŭi sangswe", *Muye yŏn'gu* 12 (2018), pp. 13–16.
20 *Kihyo sinsŏ chŏlyo*, 27r–27v.

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ever, not implausible that this language was well-known and possibly easier to understand for semi-literate readers. Since it is the language of the popular Chinese novels, which were very widely read, even outside of elite circles, it could well be that readers found this idiom easier to understand than the classical language of the ancient Confucian classics.

Soldiers at the Hullyŏn togam were supposed to train every third day, a pattern that was more of a theoretical idea than real practice.[21] Skill tests were to be held every month and those who did not pass would be transferred to other units.[22] This does emphasize the elite character of the Hullyŏn togam and it does illustrate the desirability of being assigned to the salaried ranks of the Hullyŏn togam.

Weapon skill tests were mostly performed with ranged weapons, such as bows and hand-held firearms. Records on artillery tests and tests with close-combat weapons such as spears and swords are much rarer. I assume that the reason is that ranged weapons are very easy to test through target shooting exercises, while the evaluation of close-combat skills requires more complex tests. This might even help to understand why bow-shooting was not abolished, even in units focused on firearms and close-range combat, such as the Hullyŏn togam.[23] There were well-established procedures for the testing of bow-shooting and it was relatively easy to organize a bow-shooting test. The necessary equipment was readily available and since only little materials were expended, tests for bow-shooting were relatively inexpensive. Furthermore, officers were familiar with the procedures of the test. Lastly, bow-shooting had a long tradition as a recreational past-time and could even be connected with Confucian ritual.[24] All these soft factors may well have overrode the hard fact that it would have been more useful to test soldiers for skills that were closer to their actual role in combat.

The *Jixiao xinshu* in the revised 14 *juan* version, which was reprinted and circulated in Korea in 1664, has a chapter on the testing of practical skills (ch. 6) 'Bijiaopian' 比較篇. An abbreviated version of this can also be found in the Korean compilation *Kihyo sinsŏ chŏlyo* 紀效新書節要 (ch. 4, *pigyo p'yon* 比較篇). In that chapter, Qi Jiguang states:

> As for martial techniques, they are not some official matter that you do in response to official demands. They are the means by which you face battle and protect yourself, by which you kill the enemy and gain merits. If your martial techniques are good, you will kill the enemy. How could the enemy then kill you? If your martial techniques are not like those of others, others will kill you. Not to study martial techniques, that is to not value one's life.[25]

21 Ch'a Munsŏp, *Chosŏn sidae kunje yŏn'gu*, p. 41.
22 Ibid., p. 158f.
23 For a description of the ongoing importance of bow-shooting see Ibid., p. 161–164.
24 See Siegmund, *Theorie und Praxis militärischen Wissens zwischen China und Korea im langen 17. Jahrhundert*, pp. 156–157.
25 *Jixiao xinshu* 14, p. 132.

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This laconic statement, which is missing in the abbreviated version in the *Kihyo sinsŏ chŏlyo,* is both a summary of what military training is about and a clear demarcation setting it apart from more elaborate and theoretical forms of learning. In our context, it could even be understood as an incentive for "learning for oneself", as demanded by Confucian orthodoxy according to Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200).[26] Even though this interpretation might seem a bit cynical, the rhetorical link is sound and an inspiration by this particular strain of Confucian thought seems plausible.

The audience also seems quite clear: The text is written in such a way that it could be read out to illiterate Chinese soldiers – for Korean soldiers, of course, it would have to be translated into Korean, which would usually have been done by ad-hoc translation. It also sets the tone for the rest of the chapter: Martial techniques are to be learned by realistic training practice and then tested in mock fights.

The text then states that the will to fight well in formation – as opposed to fighting on one's own – depends on a working system of rewards and punishments.[27] The same system is also found in the Korean adaptation *Kihyo sinsŏ chŏlyo.*[28] The tests and their consequences are the key to making this system work.

Major and Minor tests

All of Qi Jiguangs military manuals include instructions on how to test practical martial skills. Such tests are an important element of Qi Jiguang system and he suggests a system of contests for this purpose, known as „major tests" (kr. *tae pigyo,* ch. *da bijiao* 大比較) and as "minor tests" (kr. *so pigyo*, ch. *xiao bijiao* 小比較).

Major tests are elaborate affairs that included military ceremonies and consisted of multiple tests of weapon skill and of the correct deployment of formations. Tests for different ranks and duties are given, as well as test procedures for the various weapons. There is an example form for how to grade and record the results. Officers and medical staff are to be examined about their knowledge of signals and commands instead. It is explicitly noted that cooks and carriers are to be exempted from some of these tests.[29]

The testing procedure for close-combat weapons is described as taking the form of mock-fights between pairs of two soldiers each. The soldiers are then ranked in a relative system according to their performance. It is stated that the exact execution of training moves should be tested, as well as actual performance in the mock-fights vis-a-vis a mock adversary. Criteria on how to judge performance generally emphasize swiftness and accurateness of the attacks.[30]

26 For a study of the concept of learning and self-cultivation in the work of Zhu Xi and other Neo-Confucianism philosophers, see Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Learning for One's Self. Essays on the Individual in Neo-Confucian Thought* (New York 1991).
27 *Jixiao xinshu* 14, pp. 132–133.
28 *Kihyo sinsŏ chŏlyo*, 19r–26r.
29 *Jixiao xinshu* 14, p. 142.
30 *Lianbing shiji*, pp. 99–102.

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Minor tests were explicitly described as not requiring any special preparations. They consisted of inspections of the weapons and ammunition and of a simple test of skill. Major tests are recorded in the *sillok* only for three instances, two of them in the late 18th century:

1793, 10th month, 26th day.
1799, 10th month, 24th day.
1847, 9th month, 24th day.

Minor tests are not recorded at all in the *sillok*. It is likely that there are materials on minor tests in the institutional records.[31]

Cheating in Examinations and Tests

Examinations were an important event for the participating individuals in which much was on stake. It is thus not surprising that cheating was a common problem in examinations, which was never solved during the existence of the examination system.

Cheating was a well-known problem in bow-shooting examinations. As noted by Ch'a Munsŏp in his study on the Chosŏn military system, Chosŏn sources are very outspoken about the problem of both examination candidates and active soldiers illicitly hiring proficient bowmen to stand in for them in the bow shooting examination under false name. The sheer number of candidates in the tests seems to have been a problem, making the tests hard to control and facilitating easy cheating.[32] Especially attractive for cheating were the tests for salaried soldiers.[33] Since this is a recurring problem in the records, it seems that it has never really been solved.

This points to the main problem with military skill tests and their records. While the interest of the military administration was to get accurate results and a realistic picture of the skills of the soldiers tested, the interest of the soldiers who were to be tested was add odds with this. Bad performance in tests could have the consequence of either not being considered for a (salaried) service post, or could result in punishment of the soldier. Obviously, it was in the interest of the tested candidates to avoid these results. In the context of the somewhat chaotic and often corrupt bureaucracy and its test procedures, it was relatively easy to find a way to cheat. The results of examinations and tests are distorted for this reason and are not reliable as a source for an accurate picture of the state of the Chosŏn military. They are, however, a monument to the ingenuity of soldiers and officials

31 As for the terminology, the reform-minded 19th-century scholar Ch'oe Han'gi 崔漢綺 (1803–1879) suggested 大小比較 (*taeso pigyo*) as the terminology for a system of tests in his plan for a merit-based state. This may or may not be a coincidence, considering the broad scholarly interests of Ch'oe Han'gi.

32 Ch'a Munsŏp, *Chosŏn sidae kunje yŏn'gu*, p. 24.

33 Ibid., p. 28, 32. Salaries were one of the attractions of military positions. Tax-exemption and social prestige were other important considerations. See Ibid., p. 33–34.

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abusing the official system in their own interest and negotiating a *modus vivendi* in hostile conditions.

Maneuvers

Fighting techniques and battle formations were also examined in battle maneuvers. Battle maneuvers are different from most other forms of assessment, which focus on individuals, in that they focus on the performance of bodies of troops. In fact, this dimension of assessing the skills of a group instead of that of individuals may well be a feature that is unique to the military, or at least most prominent in the military.

Most Korean manuals of the Qi Jiguang system have a short chapter describing the procedure for *sa kongjoe* 査功罪 ("investigation of merit and failure"), which is supposed to happen at the end of a maneuver. Soldiers and officers who performed well are to be rewarded, those who did turn up late and those who performed incompetently were to be publicly criticized or otherwise punished. But no further details are given on how exactly these rewards and punishments are decided on. Instead, the focus is on the grand scheme of this event: The description is about procedures and about the troop formations that are to be used at the various stages. This could mean that rewards and punishments were regulated only loosely and would be decided on a flexible basis, adapted to the circumstances. What is clear, however, is that the goal was a reliable assessment of the performance of the participants of the maneuver. Additionally, rewards and punishment could be used to encourage and enforce good performance. As mentioned above, these methods mostly failed to yield the desired results, giving rise, instead, to illicit practices such as cheating in examinations.

Battle maneuvers varied in form and content and they were decided on a very flexible basis:

> The matters discussed in this chapter do not go beyond those of the change of formation in open and close order, the processes of approach and retreat and that of battlefield exercises. They are all listed in detail in the forms for the Great Maneuver. For the Small Maneuver it is sufficient to choose and perform two or four out of ten of those forms.[34]

This flexible character of maneuvers would have added a degree of uncertainty to the experience of the soldiers involved, as they would not know what exactly to expect.

On a side note, surprise inspections of military knowledge seem to have played a certain role at least in early Chosŏn. A *sillok* record for 1409 mentions a surprise inspection of the knowledge of military texts among military officials at Ŭihŭng

34 *Pyŏnghak chinam yŏn'ŭi* 3, p. 72.

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(northern Kyŏngsang province).[35] I have not found such inspections for later times, but that may be due to a change in terminology.

Polo (*kyŏkku* 擊毬) and Stone Fighting (*sŏkchŏn* 石戰)

Polo was a very popular with the aristocracy in Koryŏ times and it continued to be a popular pastime of the aristocracy well into the Chosŏn era, before the popularity of polo in Chosŏn began then to wane over time. Polo was considered to be an effective form of martial training, rather than purely a recreational sport. Winners in polo matches received rewards and special honours were bestowed on them in the case of polo matches at the royal court.

Up to the 16th century, polo was used often to test horsemanship and military prowess of military personnel and such events were often performed in front of the king. For the 17th and 18th century, we can still find in the *sillok* a total of seven instances of polo being used for military skill assessment. These were in 1610, 1629, 1656, 1693, 1790, and 1792. The exact date in the years varies and does not seem to have been fixed in any way. In these instances, polo was only one of the skills that were tested. The goal of the tests was to assess the candidates' proficiency in military equestrian skills.

From the 19th century on, there are no records in the *sillok* on polo as a military test. It is possible that the practice continued at other levels and without royal supervision. But even before the 19th century, polo as a military activity had declined to a level where it had little actual importance.

Stone fighting is another sport-like activity that was used in the military. In stone fights, two parties oppose each other and fight over a battlefield by throwing stones and possibly also by close combat with fists and sticks. Injuries were common, but that did not discourage people from participating. Stone-fighting was not only used in the military, but was also a common sight nearly everywhere in Chosŏn. People from all walks of life participated in stone fights both in cities and in the country-side. Although frowned upon by some contemporary observers, the practice continued and successive attempts to ban it proved futile.[36]

Stone fighting might have been even more popular as a spectator event than polo and it was certainly more approachable, since all males could take part in stone fights. Military stone fighting could be a massive event in which hundreds of soldiers took part. King T'aejong 太宗 (r. 1400–1418) held such an event in 1421, which involved various military units, so participants are likely to have numbered several hundreds. The king was pleased with the display of skill – and also with the show. Apart from food and alcohol, the participants were given a total of 100

35 *T'aejong sillok* 9/11/29#1 (1409).

36 Felix Siegmund, "Popular Violence in a Confucian World: A Short History of Stone Fighting and its Meaning", *International Journal of Korean History* 23/2 (2018), pp. 123–165. Also Felix Siegmund, "Code Switching in Social Behaviour and the Case of Stone Fighting", *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 43 (2020), pp. 97–108.

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bolts of cotton, 200 bolts of fine cotton and 4000 pieces of paper money.[37] The description of the stone fighting maneuver is as follows:

> At the *pyŏng'in* day, the Former King let the horns be blown from the Royal Bell Tower. The soldiers responded quickly to the orders and formed up as ordered. At Ch'angdŏk Palace, the Former King answered them with horn sounds. The Former King ordered Second Minister of War Yi Wŏn 李原 and Third Minister of War Yun Hoe 尹淮 to move to Ch'angdŏk Palace and wait there. After this, the Former King led the soldiers in parade formation into the Ch'angdŏk Palace and had them form up in black military dress and with feather hats behind the Right Army. The Former King ordered Second Minister of the Ministry of War, Yi Myŏngdŏk 李明德 to bring the ivory tablets and to lead the soldiers in through the Military Gate. The Former King then dismounted from his horse and gave the orders. He then remounted and entered the Military Gate. He watched from the Royal Bell Tower. The Former King himself ordered Yi Wŏn, Cho Yŏn 趙涓, and Yi Hwayŏng 李和英 to act as commanders of the three divisions and presented them with embroidered banners. The soldiers took their orders and no one dared to lose cohesion with their units or to move out of place.
>
> [The Former King] then ordered to end the formal part and to show the stone fighting. The stone throwers unit was split into a right and a left group and good [additional] stone fighters were called up to fill up the ranks. At the left, a white banner was erected, while at the right a dark banner was used as a field sign. [The two parties] were separated by a bit more than 200 feet. [The Former King] ordered: ‚No one shall dare to withdraw or pursue beyond the banners. Those who take possession of the [enemy] flag win. The winner will be rewarded handsomely.' Even though the right side was stronger than the left side, they were not victorious on a number of attempts. Kwŏn Hŭidal 權希達 and Ha Kyŏngpok 河敬復 attacked together with the cavalry troops, but the left army strongly hold their ground and showered them with stones like rain.[38]

As can be seen here, stone fighting served as a sort of military maneuver, which included the validation of fighting skills of the soldiers. Later records of stone fighting in the military are much less detailed, but the practice of stone fighting as a form of military practice and skill contest continued.

37 For a complete translation, see Siegmund, "Popular Violence in a Confucian World", pp. 151–153.

38 *Sejong sillok* 3/5/5#1 (1421).

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Preliminary Conclusions

The different forms of the evaluation of skills and knowledge in the military are not well-documented in the sources. It seems to be one of those fields of Chosŏn social practice which, while doubtlessly important and also regulated to some degree, are not documented as well as we would like and much must thus remain mostly unsolved for the moment.

Tests of military skill and knowledge outside of the state examinations were only loosely regulated and practice seems to have varied widely. The assessment of military skills was closely linked to the system of rewards and punishments. Negative evaluation of skills could directly lead to punishment. Tests were thus part of the system of controls in the military and served both to evaluate skills and to uphold discipline.

On the one hand regulations were very clear about the skills and their tests of these skills that soldiers should expect. On the other hand, such tests could be held at any time and they had the power of surprise. This should have been an effective system for controlling and enforcing a skill level among military personnel. It remains unclear for now how exactly this was handled in actual practice.

It seems possible that a better picture could be pieced together by in-depth studies of the records kept by the military institutions, which record their day-to-day activities. This would be a worthwhile topic for future studies.

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Abbreviated Storytelling as Knowledge Evaluation: Encoding and Decoding *The Journey to the West* in Korea in the 17th Century and Today*

Barbara Wall

Introduction

Abbreviated storytelling is a common real-world phenomenon.[1] The term generally means the use of relatively brief references to activate story worlds, memories, or familiar narratives. The question of just how brief those references can be, or to what extent we can abbreviate before a story becomes unrecognizable and the reference disappears, is an interesting one. In their article "Remember That Time? Telling Interesting Stories from Past Interactions", Behrooz, Swanson, and Jhala show how people regularly apply abbreviated storytelling in conversation to refer to our past interactions and collaborations.[2] David Graeber and David Wengrow illustrate how single images have served as visual cues to stories shared by a community since ancient times.[3] Furthermore, it is commonly assumed that storytelling in general is fundamental to any human cooperation.[4] Taken together, these

* This paper uses the discussion on abbreviated storytelling in my forthcoming monograph as starting point to explore the question of how abbreviated storytelling can serve as a method to evaluate literary knowledge. Barbara Wall, *Dynamic Stability: A Graphical Approach to The Journey to the West in Korea* (Leiden 2024), Chapter five.

1 Tim Tangherlini, "Toward a Generative Model of Legend: Pizzas, Bridges, Vaccines, and Witches", *Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2018), p. 3.

2 Morteza Behrooz, Reid Swanson, and Arnav Jhala, "Remember that time? Telling interesting stories from past interactions", in *Interactive Storytelling*, ed. Henrik Schoenau-Fog et al. (Cham 2015), p. 93.

3 David Graeber and David Wengrow. *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York 2021), p. 388. Graeber and Wengrow emphasize that images in many cultures were not supposed to illustrate or represent a whole story, but rather served as visual cues to evoke a certain memory. We could call this phenomenon abbreviated visual storytelling. Abbreviated visual storytelling plays a significant role in the arts of memory, where single images, also called mnemonic images, encode whole narratives. For more, see my article where I explore the role of visual translation for the circulation of *The Journey*: Barbara Wall, "Translation beyond the Written Word: Imagining the Transnational Spread of The Journey to the West in East Asia", in *Transnational East Asian Studies*, ed. Kevin Cawley and Julia Schneider (Liverpool 2022), pp. 61–75.

4 Daniel Smith et al., "Cooperation and the Evolution of Hunter-Gatherer Storytelling", *Nature communications* 8, no. 1 (2017).

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ideas highlight the fact that humans repeat common stories, often abbreviated, to create or recreate the feeling of belonging together.

On the other hand, abbreviated storytelling can also create the feeling of being excluded, since it divides recipients into what Linda Hutcheon calls a "knowing audience" [5] and an unknowing audience. I therefore suggest in this paper that abbreviated storytelling is an encoding practice that can be used to evaluate the literary knowledge of the audience. In an article on the canon debate, James A. Banks, an expert for social studies education, defines knowledge as "the way a person explains or interprets reality."[6] In a similar vein, I suggest understanding literary knowledge as the way a person explains or interprets literature.[7] More precisely, in this paper, literary knowledge broadly refers to all knowledge that helps us to decode stories. If the literary knowledge is sufficient, the recipients are able to decode a story and are thus included in the knowing audience or in-group. If their literary knowledge is not sufficient, they cannot crack the code and belong to the out-group.

Storytelling at family gatherings or school reunions might be a good example to lay out some of the issues at hand. To take a case in point, the older generation in my family tends to repeat stories about a family vacation on the Danish island of Bornholm. We lost a suitcase, the ferry to the island could not leave, and my parents illegally brought German sausages to Denmark. Like the Proustian *madeleine*, "Bornholm" became a code name representing all adventures that happened during the vacation. It began to serve as a cue that revived all our memories – or to put it more precisely, "Bornholm" initializes the story that we now call memories. Stories usually have multiple actants (people, places, objects), but the one actant "Bornholm" alone was enough to evoke the whole story. We can understand "Bornholm" as what Nancy Miller calls in her "Minifesto for a New Age" an extreme "distillation" [8] of the vacation story – reductive, of course, but powerful enough to stick in our minds and to initialize the vacation story in spite of (or possibly because of) its succinctness.

Telling a story by activating only one actant, which I would call an extreme form of abbreviated storytelling, only works if the story is well known among the audience. For instance, only those who know about my family's vacation on Bornholm can crack the code "Bornholm". The code for a story does not necessarily have to refer to a place; it can also be a character, an object, or a combination of actants. As an illustration, the sight of the statue of the Little Mermaid in Copen-

5 Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London 2013), p. 120.

6 James A. Banks, "The Canon Debate, Knowledge Construction, and Multicultural Education", *Educational researcher* 22, no. 5 (1993), p. 5.

7 For a more detailed discussion on literary knowledge see also Barbara Wall, "Literary knowledge reflected in Korean intertexts of *Xiyouji* (西遊記, *The Journey to the West*)", in *Integration Processes in the Circulation of Knowledge: Cases from Korea and Beyond*, ed. Marion Eggert and Florian Pölking (Frankfurt a.M. 2016), pp. 99–137.

8 Nancy Miller, "Minifesto for a new age", *Wired*, March 1, 2007. URL: https://www.wired.com/2007/03/snackminifesto/ (June 2022).

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hagen alone can initialize Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairy tale; or a reference to a sword in a stone might trigger the story of King Arthur and his sword Excalibur. Extremely abbreviated storytelling is not limited to family gatherings or reunions with old friends; it also plays an important role in the circulation of popular stories in general. When we retell stories that we share, it is often not necessary to tell the story in full detail or length. Often, we can assume a general familiarity with popular stories, so the tellers just need to mention parts of the story to make the audience remember. We can understand these parts as allusions, magical phrases, or codes that activate a familiar story world. Whether or not the code can be cracked depends on the literary knowledge of the recipient. In other words, encoding a story by abbreviating it can be used as a method to evaluate the literary knowledge of the receiver and, by doing so, confirm who belongs to the in- and out-group.

Abbreviated storytelling is a universal phenomenon. Here I would like to explore two clusters of abbreviated storytelling from Korea to demonstrate how abbreviated storytelling can serve as a method to evaluate audience knowledge. The two clusters are related to one of the most popular story worlds in East Asia, *The Journey to the West* (hereafter *The Journey*). The first cluster comes from the beginning of the 17th century when a group of Korean scholars around Yu Mongin 柳夢寅 (1559–1623) first collectively decoded a painting as an allusion to *The Journey* and then encoded *The Journey* again in their inscriptions on the painting. The painting in question was one piece from the Ming painting collection *Gushi huapu* 顧氏畫譜 (Mr. Gu's Painting Manual, 1603), and it depicted a monkey. The second cluster focuses on three more recent examples that each encoded the "jump out of Buddha's palm" scene from *The Journey* to initialize its story world. These three latter examples include the short story "Tubŏntchae sangbong" ("Second meeting", 1955) by the North Korean novelist Han Ungbin, the novel *Pimyŏng ŭl ch'ajasŏ* ("In Search of an Inscription") by the South Korean novelist Pok Kŏil, and the seventh episode of the South Korean TV series *Ssŭlssŭlhago ch'allanhasin – Tokkaebi* ("Guardian: The Lonely and Great God", 2016–2017).

Before we look closely at these two example clusters, I will first give a brief introduction to the story cloud of *The Journey to the West* and discuss how we can understand "abbreviated storytelling" in this study. We will then move on to explore how the given examples of abbreviated storytelling might have served as encoding and decoding practices to evaluate the audience's literary knowledge.

The Journey to the West as Story Cloud in Constant Flux

The Journey is one of the most popular story worlds in East Asia. Importantly, this does not mean that everyone who claims to be familiar with *The Journey* has read or watched the same version of the story. *The Journey* is many and constantly changes its form. It can be a poem, a newspaper novel, a movie, a dance, an epitaph, or a webtoon, to name but a few forms of media in which versions of *The Journey* have appeared. I therefore suggest imagining *The Journey* not as a static

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work that has been adapted into various versions, but rather as a story cloud that includes all versions. The story cloud changes form when new versions join or old versions fall into oblivion.[9]

One of the best-known versions today might be the manga *Dragon Ball* created by Akira Toriyama. However, in the academic realm, *The Journey* is traditionally identified with the Shidetang 世德堂 version of the 100-chapter novel allegedly written by Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 (1500?–1582?) in China at the end of the 16th century. Since this attribution is highly controversial, I would like to emphasize that we should not equate the story cloud of *The Journey* with the Shidetang version of the story. While the Shidetang version is a static separate work, the story cloud of *The Journey* comprises multiple versions. That is to say, the story cloud of *The Journey* includes the Shidetang version but cannot be reduced to the Shidetang version.

For readers who are unfamiliar with the story cloud of *The Journey*, though, the Shidetang version provides an adequate orientation to the actants (characters, objects, places) of the story cloud. The novel tells the story of the Monkey King Sun Wukong who protects the Buddhist monk Tripitaka during his odyssey from China to the Western Heaven in search of the real Buddhist scriptures. Besides Sun Wukong, Tripitaka is accompanied by three more disciples: Zhu Bajie (the pig), Sha Wujing (the monster), and a dragon horse. The prologue starts with Sun Wukong's miraculous birth out of a stone, describes his career as Monkey King at Flower-Fruit Mountain, and tells how Patriarch Subhūti teaches him about his supernatural abilities. He defeats every antagonist with the help of his miraculous weapon, the Compliant Rod. Sun Wukong's battle culminates in his fight against all heavenly authorities. When even the Jade Emperor, who reigns in Heaven, sees no way to defeat Sun Wukong, Buddha comes to help and makes a bet with Sun Wukong. He promises to yield to Sun Wukong if the monkey manages to jump out of his palm. Sun Wukong fails and is, thus, imprisoned beneath the Five-Phases Mountain for the next 500 years.

In the meantime, Bodhisattva Guanyin begins to search for a pilgrim who can find the real Buddhist scriptures in the West, and he settles on the monk Tripitaka. Taizong, an emperor of Tang China who has just come back from the Underworld, organizes a Grand Mass for the chosen monk. Tripitaka can free Sun Wukong from the Five-Phases Mountain, and he offers to do so on the condition that Sun Wukong accompanies and protects him on his journey to the West. The monk controls the monkey by means of a cap that Sun Wukong wears on his head that hurts whenever he is not obedient. After he encounters and accepts the other three disci-

9 I used to call *The Journey* a "story world" or "story universe" that is comprised of multiple variations. See, for example: Barbara Wall, "Dynamic Texts as Hotbed for Transmedia Storytelling: A Case Study on the Story Universe of *The Journey to the West*", *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019), p. 2118. Recently, I started to call *The Journey* a "story cloud" instead of "story world" to emphasize the continuous shapeshifting of *The Journey*. See Barbara Wall and Dong Myeong Lee, "Stability in Variation: Visualizing the Actantial Core of *The Journey to the West*", *Korean Studies* 47 (2023), p. 118.

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ples Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing and a horse, Tripitaka's actual odyssey begins. The pilgrims overcome multiple adventures and finally obtain the Buddhist scriptures.

The beginning and the end of the novel serve as a frame, which is filled with about 30 episodes. Each of the episodes repeats a similar pattern:

1. Hindrance: The pilgrims encounter hindrances on their journey, mostly in the form of monsters and demons from a variety of religious backgrounds.
2. Plan: Sun Wukong contrives a plan to overcome the hindrances, which often involves his supernatural abilities and the help of Buddhist advisors.
3. Victory: The monsters and demons are defeated.
4. Journey: The pilgrims happily continue the journey.

This simple repetitive pattern lends itself particularly well to intertextual borrowing and creative versions – not only of the individual episodes, but also of the pattern itself. The episodes often seem to be so similar in structure that many versions choose only a few and mix the order of them.[10] Actants of *The Journey* have appeared in endless versions both inside and outside of Asian cultures, which is part of the reason it is so difficult to reduce *The Journey* to one static work.

How to Abbreviate a Story Cloud that is never Whole?

Approaching *The Journey* as a story cloud in flux that comprises all versions makes much more sense given the ways the story exists in the world. While this approach seems to be appropriate to appreciate the continuously changing story cloud of *The Journey*, it also seems to undermine the basic assumption of this study. If we understand *The Journey* as a story cloud in constant flux, then how can we decide which version is "abbreviated" and which is "whole"? In other words, how can we define abbreviated *Journeys* if there is no "whole" original of *The Journey*?

Tim Tangherlini generally calls versions or variations "instantiations"[11] of a story cloud and emphasizes that individual stories or variations tend to activate only small parts of the entire narrative framework. Here, "small parts" refer to actants (mainly characters, objects, places) and their relationships with each other. The film critic and film theorist André Bazin, for example, suggests that characters can serve as codes when he explains that "[w]ith time, we do see the ghosts of famous characters rise far above the great novels from which they emanate."[12] Characters, but often also objects or places, in some cases seem to become independent from the stories they were born in and start a life of their own in

10 A primary example is the visual version of *The Journey* on the pagoda panels of the Kyŏngch'ŏn Temple from 1348, which can now be found in the National Museum of Korea. See Wall, "Translation beyond the Written Word", p. 67.

11 Tangherlini, "Generative model", p. 7.

12 André Bazin, "Adaptation, or the cinema as digest", in *Film adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (London 2000), p. 23. A primary example would be the character of Xue Rengui, as Josh Stenberg explains in Josh Stenberg, "From the (Tang) general to the (Jakarta) specific: Xue Rengui across time and space", *Asian Studies Review* 44, no. 2 (2020), pp. 201–219.

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variations. Robert Ray explicitly calls these actants "codes that are never medium-specific."[13] In other words, authors select single actants or a combination of them to abbreviate a story. Which of the actants in *The Journey* will work to create an abbreviated version of *The Journey*?

Tangherlini explains that "through the repeated telling of stories, a narrative framework, which comprises a relatively stable group of actants"[14] emerges. We will call this stable group of actants the "actant pool" of a story cloud. To define the actant pool of *The Journey*, I have exclusively focused on 60 Korean variations of *The Journey* and compared which actants each variation activates.[15] Since we are dealing with a dynamic story cloud in flux, the selection of variations is by no means and cannot be exhaustive. Still, I have tried to be as comprehensive as possible with the means available to me. I argue that the variety and richness of variations of *The Journey* in Korea legitimize my rhetorical stance that the Korean variations may be considered a heuristic subset of variations of *The Journey* in general. Still, given the immense number of variations of *The Journey*, it is, of course, not the aim of this study – and not even possible – to define the exact number of actants that are affiliated with *The Journey*.

Nevertheless, a thorough examination of the 60 Korean variations suggests that there is a relatively stable group of 67 actants. In this study, these 67 actants form the actant pool of *The Journey*, including 12 characters, 3 objects, 6 places, 6 motifs, the title, the author, and 38 episodes.[16] I argue that while the story cloud of *The Journey* is continuously changing, it is this relatively stable group of actants that provides stability for the story cloud. I therefore suggest also using the actant pool as a basis to define abbreviated storytelling, which means the fewer actants a variation uses from the 67 actants in the actant pool, the more abbreviated the variation is. In other words, abbreviated storytelling does not necessarily mean that a variation is short and simple. In this paper, abbreviated storytelling implies that a variation uses only a limited number of actants from the actant pool of *The Journey*.

To distinguish abbreviated storytelling from non-abbreviated storytelling, for example, in the form of translations or adaptations, I will call abbreviated variations of *The Journey* "intertexts" following the terminology Gérard Genette developed in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*.[17] According to Genette, transla-

13 Robert B. Ray, "The Field of 'Literature and Film'", in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (London 2000), p. 40.

14 Tangherlini, "Generative Model", p. 2.

15 Please find all 60 variations with bibliographical details in the database affiliated to this study. URL: https://www.meister21.com/diagram.php?journeyDBnum=109

16 A complete list of the 67 integral actants is provided on the website, which serves as database for this study. Go to the link in footnote 15 and click "radial". The database differentiates between actants and episodes as I do in Wall, *Dynamic Stability*. In this paper I approach the 38 episodes as actants based on their redundancy and independence. Compare Wall, Lee, "Stability in Variation", pp. 117–144.

17 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln 1997).

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tions and adaptations would correspond to "hypertexts". Both intertextuality and hypertextuality refer to a relationship between texts – but while intertexts refer to the "limited figure," hypertextuality deals with the "structural whole."[18] While the division of variations into hypertexts and intertexts is an heuristic means to approach abbreviated storytelling in the form of intertexts, I would like to emphasize that the boundaries between the categories of intertexts and hypertexts are blurred, and I would therefore suggest understanding hypertexts and intertexts as tendencies on a broad spectrum rather than as strictly separated categories.[19] This means, in this analysis, we will focus on intertexts as examples of abbreviated storytelling.

Due to its ambiguity and vagueness, the term "intertextuality" arouses various expectations. In particular, I would like to highlight two characteristics of intertexts that Genette emphasizes. First, Genette describes intertextuality as the "relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts." For this study, this means that a text can be an intertext of *The Journey*, but at the same time also an intertext of other story clouds.[20] We will see in the following that many intertexts in this study engage with several story clouds at the same time. Second, according to Genette, intertexts refer to the "limited figure". In some cases, intertexts might therefore seem to be merely allusions, echoes, or references to *The Journey*, and readers might wonder if they are worthy of discussion. Tangherlini admits that many narrative models have indeed failed to account for intertexts that only partially activate narrative frameworks.[21] Tangherlini himself, however, emphasizes the importance of what he calls "abbreviated storytelling" and states that "people rarely tell complete stories."[22] Michael Emmerich points into the same direction in his study on *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語), when he uses the term "replacement" for what we call "variation" in order to stress the equality of variations. He emphasizes that each single variation *is* the story and has the potential to replace the whole story. He emphasizes in the same vein as Tangherlini that "no size is too small" so long as the variation "enables its readers or consumers to participate in the communal act of valuing the story it was made to represent."[23] In other words, Emmerich also suggests that abbreviated variations or intertexts can replace the story if they manage to enable their consumers to participate in the communal act of valuing the story.

For the thematical focus of this volume it is important to emphasize that whether an intertext can enable consumers to value the story does, of course, not only

18 Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 3.
19 For a more detailed discussion on the differentiation between translations, adaptations and intertexts, see Wall, *Dynamic Stability*, Chapter one.
20 Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 1.
21 Tangherlini, "Generative Model", p. 9.
22 Tim Tangherlini et al., "An Automated Pipeline for the Discovery of Conspiracy and Conspiracy Theory Narrative Frameworks: Bridgegate, Pizzagate and Storytelling on the Web", in *Plos One* 15, no. 6 (2020), p. 4.
23 Michael Emmerich, *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature* (New York 2013), p. 11.

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depend on the intertext itself, but also on the literary knowledge of the consumers. In Wolfgang Iser's words, a literary work consists of two poles: the author's text and the reader's concretization.[24] That is to say, the reception of a text can be difficult in two ways. On the one hand, the code of an intertext can be difficult to crack because it is hidden or almost invisible. As an example for his argument that "no size is too small where replacements of the masterpiece are concerned" Emmerich mentions the *Genji monogatari* in the form of a cake, specifically in the form of the Millennial Anniversary Matcha Baumkuchen. If we see the name of the *baumkuchen*, we might be able to participate in the story cloud of *Genji monogatari*, but if we just eat it without further explanation, we would not be aware of being part of any story cloud. In some cases, no matter how familiar we are with details of *The Journey* and how rich our literary knowledge is, it would still be difficult to crack the code without any additional hints. On the other hand, the literary knowledge of the recipient or consumer might simply not be sufficient to decode a code, even if it is relatively overt. No matter how sparkling the pearls are that are thrown before swine, swine will never appreciate the value of the pearls. At one extreme, a fan of *The Journey* might see references to *The Journey* in everything. A portrait of a monkey might be enough for a fan to participate in the communal act of valuing *The Journey*. In other words, cultural illiteracy would make any story cloud impossible, while extreme fandom would make any story cloud limitless.[25] In short, whether a text becomes part of a story cloud depends as much on the text as on the literary knowledge of the receiver of the text.

We will now join what might have been a poetry jam in the 17th century to explore how abbreviated storytelling might have served as a playful way to evaluate the literary knowledge of a receiving community.

Inscriptions on the Ming Painting Collection *Gushi huapu*

The painting below (fig. 8) is a schematic reproduction of Jiang Yin's 姜隱 (?–?) *Bunatu* 補衲圖 ("Mending a garment") from the Ming painting collection *Gushi huapu*, which was compiled by the court painter Gu Bing 顧炳 (?–?) in 1603. The focus of the analysis in the following paragraphs, however, will not be on the painting itself, but rather on the inscriptions by three Korean scholars that show how they first decoded the painting as an intertext of *The Journey* only to then encode *The Journey* again in their inscriptions on the painting. In other words, the inscribers first decoded the painting as an abbreviated variation or intertext of *The Journey* and then produced new intertexts in the form of inscriptions. We will explore how the three men playfully used the actants on the painting as a

24 Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens* (Stuttgart 1984 [1976]), p. 38. I elaborate on this aspect in Barbara Wall, "Transformations of *Xiyouji* in Korean Intertexts and Hypertexts" (PhD diss., Ruhr-University Bochum 2014), pp. 24–25.

25 Wall, *Dynamic Stability*, Chapter two.

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Fig. 8: Schematic reproduction of Jiang Yin's painting in *Gushi huapu*[26]

code for *The Journey* and how this play can serve both to evaluate and to confirm the knowledge within the group.

In Jiang Yin's painting in *Gushi huapu*, we can see an old monk who is mending his robe and a small monkey who plays with sewing threads next to the monk. If we perceive the painting as an intertext of *The Journey*, it is an example of extremely abbreviated storytelling activating only two of the 67 actants from the actant pool. We know from records by the scholar Yu Suk 柳潚 (1564–1636) that it was a group of in total eight scholars who appreciated the painting collection together and took turns in writing inscriptions on the paintings.[27] Yu Suk writes:

26 Monika Lettau, "The Monk and the Monkey", 2016.

27 Kim Hongdae, "322 p'yŏn si wa kŭl ŭl t'onghae pon 17 segi chŏngi *Ko-ssi hwabo*", in *Onji nonch'ong* 9 (Seoul 2003), p. 154.

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> The painting collection includes four volumes. My uncle [Yu Mongin] wrote the first poem. Then Nongmun, Ch'angchu, Hakkok [Hong Sŏbong], Haebong [Hong Myŏngwŏn], Kugang and Nam'ong took turns in exchanging their poems.[28]

Today, only the inscriptions by Hong Sŏbong 洪瑞鳳 (1572–1645), Hong Myŏngwŏn 洪命元 (1573–1623), and Yu Suk still exist in their respective collective writings (*munjip* 文集). Ku Ponhyŏn emphasizes in his article on the inscriptions that all eight scholars were either relatives or close friends who were used to corresponding with each other by writing poems.[29] We can therefore assume that the eight inscribers were aware of each other's literary knowledge. It is also worth noting that according to Yu Suk's records, his uncle Yu Mongin was the first who commented on each painting. Nongmun 鹿門, which is the pen name of Hong Kyŏngsin 洪慶臣 (1557–1623), wrote his inscriptions after Yu Mongin. Given the fact that Hong Kyŏngsin was two years older than Yu Mongin, it was obviously not necessarily the seniority principle that determined the order in which the scholars wrote the inscriptions. Ku Ponhyŏn assumes that Yu Mongin started each round of inscriptions because it was probably him who possessed the painting collection.[30]

We can expect that Yu Mongin's comments will have impacted the inscriptions of the other scholars who joined him in appreciating the paintings. That means the inscribers would need not only to decode the painting itself but to decode the painting in relation to Yu Mongin's inscription. We also know that Yu Mongin was aware of *The Journey*, since he explicitly mentions the names of the main characters in his miscellaneous tales (*Ŏu yadam* 於于野譚).[31] In other words, it might have been Yu Mongin who had been the enthusiastic "fan" of *The Journey* and who encouraged the others to decode Jiang Yin's painting as an intertext of *The Journey*. But no matter who was the driving force behind the playful references to *The Journey*, we can expect that each inscription influenced the ones that were written later. Kim Hongdae points out that while all inscriptions on all paintings are written as pentasyllabic quatrains (*oŏn chŏlgu* 五言絶句), it is striking that the inscribers tend to avoid the same rhymes.[32] This might suggest a certain schismogenetic urge among the group members, which means all inscribers might have been so much aware of belonging to the same small bubble that they tried to break out and do something different from each other in the inscriptions, while still maintaining

28 *Ch'wihŭljip* 1:1a.

29 Ku Ponhyŏn, "*Ko-ssi hwabo* ŭi chŏllae wa Chosŏn ŭi chehwasi", *Kyujanggak* 28 (2005), p. 58.

30 Ibid., p. 57.

31 "When newly appointed officials meet their predecessors for the first time, they have to be able to tell the names of the ten divine figures on top of the palace gates for ten times … The names are Master of Great Tang (Taedang sabu 大唐師傅 [Tripitaka]), Pilgrim Sun (Son haengja, 孫行者 [Sun Wukong]), Zhu Bajie 猪八戒, [and] Monk Sha (Sa Hwasang, 沙和尚 [Sha Wujing])." Yu Mongin, *Ŏu yadam*, trans. Cha Kwisŏn, Yi Wŏlyŏng (Seoul 2004), p. 32. For more details see Wall, "Dynamic Texts", pp. 2136–2138.

32 Kim Hongdae, "322 p'yŏn si wa kŭl ŭl t'onghae pon 17 segi chŏngi *Ko-ssi hwabo*", p. 172.

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the same form. Yu Suk explicitly mentions this mutual influence in his comments on Wu Guan's 吳瓘 (?–?) fruit painting, when he emphasizes that he was the only one among the inscribers who decoded the fruits on the painting as crab apples (*kŭm* 檎), while the others decoded them as persimmons (*si* 柿).[33] To take the potential influence of earlier inscriptions on later inscriptions into account, I suggest comparing the inscriptions in the order in which they were written.

The problem is that while Yu Suk mentions the order in which his seven companions wrote the inscriptions, he does not mention himself. Ku Ponhyŏn believes that Yu Suk, the nephew of Yu Mongin, came last,[34] but given the fact that Yu Suk was eight or nine years older than Hong Sŏbong and Hong Myŏngwŏn, it might have also been possible that Yu Suk wrote his inscriptions before Hong Sŏbong and Hong Myŏngwŏn. Although we have no evidence that this was the actual order in which the "poetry jam" happened, we will start with Yu Suk's inscription and then continue with Hong Sŏbong's and Hong Myŏngwŏn's inscriptions. Yu Suk writes,

> King Sun is clever and smart. He can arrange the threads with his hands. In former times he was offered a jade ring and, thus, could not forget the sewing monk. (Jiang Yin's monk mends his unraveled robe. A monkey arranges the threads with his arms.)[35]

Although there is no explicit connection between the monkey and Sun Wukong in the painting itself nor in annotations in *Gushi huapu*, Yu Suk alludes to Sun Wukong in a couple of ways. The two actants (monkey and monk) on the painting are enough to decode the painting as an intertext of *The Journey* and to encode the story again in his inscription. First, "King Sun" (*wang Sun* 王孫) explicitly refers to the "monkey king." Furthermore, the jade ring (*okhwan* 玉環) seems to be a stand-in for the cap or headband by which Tripitaka can control Sun Wukong in many variations. To put it in another way, as the cap symbolizes Tripitaka's power over Sun Wukong, so the ring always reminds the monkey of the monk, as Yu Suk's inscription says. Let us see what Hong Sŏbong sees in the painting.

> I have heard about ghosts building walls. Now I see [in this painting] a monkey who arranges threads. Excelling at magic is his family occupation. This is what my master Han Yu said. (Jiang Yin).[36]

While Hong Sŏbong does not explicitly mention Sun Wukong's name, he still seems to allude to his magical powers. In other words, he encodes Sun Wukong in his inscription without explicitly mentioning the name of the monkey. We could

33 *Ch'wihŭljip* 1:6b. Wu Guan's painting and the inscriptions on this painting are one of the primary examples in Kim Hongdae's article on the *Gushi huapu*. See Kim Hongdae, "322 p'yŏn si wa kŭl ŭl t'onghae pon 17 segi chŏngi *Ko-ssi hwabo*", p. 172.

34 Ku Ponhyŏn, "*Ko-ssi hwabo* ŭi chŏllae wa Chosŏn ŭi chehwasi", p. 58.

35 *Ch'wihŭljip* 1:9a.

36 *Hakkokchip* 1:10b.

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understand the latter half of the inscription as a playful reference to the end of a popular farewell piece the Chinese poet Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) wrote to the monk Gao Xian 高閑 (?–?):

> I have heard that Buddhists excel at magic and have many abilities.[37]

While Han Yu praises the Buddhist monk, Hong Sŏbong praises the monkey in the painting for being good at magic. Given the parallels to Han Yu's piece, Hong Sŏbong's inscription suggests that the monkey in the painting also has a Buddhist background, which is an additional connection to *The Journey*. Readers are cued to understand the monkey as the Buddhist disciple Sun Wukong.

Finally, Hong Myŏngwŏn's inscription is even more explicit. He writes,

> The old monk leads a simple life, he sews his clothes by himself, but has the threads pulled by his young disciple. Isn't that Sun Wukong? (On Jiang Yin).[38]

Hong Myŏngwŏn first compares the monk to Laozi and Buddha, both of whom also appear as actants in *The Journey*. Hong Myŏngwŏn decodes the monkey explicitly as Sun Wukong by asking the reader: "Isn't that Sun Wukong?" as if he talked about an old friend. This kind of rhetorical question at the end of the inscription suggests that the atmosphere in which the inscribers created the pentasyllabic quatrains was relatively relaxed and filled with humor. Kim Hongdae points out that we can also find humorous remarks in other inscriptions.[39]

As we imagine how this kind of poetry jam in 17th century Chosŏn might have served as a means for knowledge evaluation, we should not forget that the scholars did not only write inscriptions on this one painting. The *Gushi huapu* includes no less than 106 paintings, and the scholars wrote inscriptions on all of them. We do not know how many hours or days they spent on the activity of writing inscriptions, but we could imagine this activity as a playful private competition or maybe even as something close to a drinking game.[40] We could compare it to more recent examples of playful storytelling. Given the fact that the inscriptions were based on visual images, we might compare the 17th century poetry jam, for example, to story jams based on Rory's Story Cubes®.[41] It is remarkable that the inscribers wrote their "jam" in the form of pentasyllabic quatrains, but given the fact that they wrote more than hundred inscriptions, they might have been so

37 Ronald C. Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge Mass. 1994), p. 198.
38 *Haebongjip* 1:14b.
39 Kim Hongdae, "322 p'yŏn si wa kŭl ŭl t'onghae pon 17 segi chŏngi *Ko-ssi hwabo*", p. 171.
40 Yin Shoufu mentions that literati played literary games in Yin Shoufu, „Visualizing Divergence: Rhetorical Education and Historical Imagination in China and Korea (ca. 1314–1644)" Korean Studies 47, no. 1 (2023), p. 98.
41 Rory's Story Cubes are a set of nine dice with different images on each side of the dice, which means the dice offer 54 images in total. The game starts by throwing the dice and telling a story based on the nine images that appear on the top of the nine dice.

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well trained in this activity that it was as easy for them to write the inscriptions in meter as improvising stories based on story cubes is for contemporary storytellers.

Both the painting collection from the 17th century and Rory's Story Cubes provide visual images, which the storytellers use to create new stories. In both cases, the inscribers or storytellers can be encouraged to relate their stories to a certain topic. For example, Weder, Lemke and Tungarat describe in a recent study on the practical use of story cubes in narrative inquiries how they used story cubes to learn more about the understanding of sustainability among 35 interviewees.[42] While the 17th-century inscribers related the images on the painting to their knowledge of *The Journey* and created a new intertext of the story cloud, the 35 interviewees in Weder, Lemke and Tungarat's experiment related the images on the story cubes to their knowledge of sustainability.

If we understand the poetry jam in the 17th century as a creative and playful event based on literary knowledge, it would seem that any one of the inscriptions might be more or less creative, but not lend itself to any objective test of right and wrong. Ku Ponhyŏn, however, argues that some of the inscriptions by Yu Suk, Hong Sŏbong, and Hong Myŏngwŏn reveal their lack of knowledge regarding the paintings.[43] According to Ku Ponhyŏn, in some cases the decoding process of the paintings by the inscribers had just gone wrong and the inscribers were not able to crack the code of the paintings. If Ku Ponhyŏn is right, then that means that writing inscriptions on paintings can actually serve as a "test" of right and wrong and literary knowledge, or, in other words, a very straightforward knowledge evaluation. It is possible, however, that the inscribers' aim might not have been to demonstrate their knowledge at all, but rather to play with their knowledge without prioritizing facts in all cases.

Analyzing the inscriptions for all 106 paintings would go beyond the scope of this paper. While keeping Ku Ponhyŏn's reservations in mind, I argue that at least for the painting *Bunatu* the aim of the inscriptions was not to analyze the painting, but rather to play with the literary knowledge shared by the inscribers. It is precisely this play of knowledge that implied a competition and also an evaluation of knowledge, but not in the form of a test of right and wrong.

The 17th-century scholars had no story cubes, but instead a painting showing two potential actants from *The Journey*: a monk and a monkey. Not surprisingly, all three extant inscriptions revolve around the monkey. Yu Suk and Hong Myŏngwŏn encoded *The Journey* in their inscriptions by referring to the two characters from the paintings: the monk and the monkey. Yu Suk alludes to Sun Wukong's headband, Hong Myŏngwŏn explicitly mentions Sun Wukong. In contrast, Hong Sŏbong uses another technique to encode *The Journey* in his inscription. He

42 Franzisca Weder, Stella Lemke and Amornpan Tungarat, "(Re)storying Sustainability: The Use of Story Cubes in Narrative Inquiries to Understand Individual Perceptions of Sustainability", *Sustainability* 11, no. 19 (2019), pp. 5–8.

43 Ku Ponhyŏn, "*Ko-ssi hwabo* ŭi chŏllae wa Chosŏn ŭi chehwasi", pp. 60–61.

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interweaves vague references to *The Journey* with an allusion to a famous farewell poem by Han Yu. In other words, while Yu Suk and Hong Myŏngwŏn used their literary knowledge of *The Journey* to write their inscriptions, Hong Sŏbong went one step further and used another intertext to allude to the monkey and to initialize *The Journey*.

All three scholars decoded the painting as an intertext of *The Journey*. As the painting is not explicitly related to *The Journey* in the *Gushi huapu*, we cannot follow Ku Ponhyŏn's example and call the inscriptions "right" or "wrong." As mentioned above, we do not even know whether all the inscribers would have associated the painting with *The Journey* themselves or whether Yu Mongin or someone else encouraged everyone to relate the painting to *The Journey*, but it seems to be clear that *The Journey* was part of the literary knowledge shared by all participants in the poetry jam. That means decoding the painting as an intertext of *The Journey* was not the real challenge but rather an initial confirmation of shared literary knowledge. Everyone in the group was simply expected to belong to the "knowing audience," and the inscriptions confirm this expectation.

It seems that decoding the painting as an intertext of *The Journey* had been just the first step of a playful private competition. I argue that the real challenge or, perhaps better, the real joyful opportunity to demonstrate one's literary knowledge, started when each inscriber had to encode *The Journey* in his inscription, since this inscription would reveal how knowledgeable and, of course, how creative and how literarily talented each inscriber really was. Above, we have already described the diverse techniques the inscribers have used to encode *The Journey* in their inscriptions. It is clear that the inscriptions do not only confirm the literary knowledge of *The Journey* shared by the group of inscribers, but they also give an idea of the depth and breadth of literary knowledge possessed by each inscriber and can therefore serve as a means to evaluate literary knowledge.

"Jumping out of Buddha's palm" in Contemporary Korean Literature and Popular Culture

The second cluster of intertexts focuses on a more anonymous way of knowledge evaluation, where it is not a group that evaluates knowledge, but rather the readers themselves. While the examples above suggest that the three inscribers in the 17th century decoded and encoded *The Journey* primarily for the group's private use, the following three intertexts encode the "jumping out of Buddha's palm" scene totally independently from each other. One is a novel from South Korea (1987), another is a short story from North Korea (1999), and the third is a K-drama (2016–2017).

In the novel *Pimyŏng ŭl ch'ajasŏ* ("In Search of an Inscription")[44] from 1987, the author Pok Kŏil compares the protagonist of the novel to Sun Wukong in Buddha's

44 Pok Kŏil, *Pimyŏng ŭl ch'ajasŏ*. Vol. 1 (Seoul 2013). Thanks to Dennis Würthner for alerting me to this novel.

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palm to emphasize how helpless the protagonist feels during negotiations with an American company.

> He used to feel like Sun Wukong who played in the palm of Buddha.[45]

The North Korean novelist Han Ungbin uses the palm scene in his short story "Tubŏntchae sangbong" ("Second Meeting")[46] to stress that changing one's thoughts and accepting new ideas can be as difficult as it was for Sun Wukong to jump out of Buddha's palm.

> No matter how far people jump, they cannot leave their lives. It is the same as Sun Wukong who couldn't jump out of [Buddha] Śākyamuni's palm.[47]

And, in the seventh episode of the South Korean TV series *Ssŭlssŭlhago Ch'allanhasin – Tokkaebi* ("Guardian: The Lonely and Great God", dir. Lee Eung-bok 2016–2017) the male protagonist Kim Sin compares his power to that of Buddha when explaining to the female protagonist why he always knows where she is:

> No matter how far you try to jump, you are always on my palm.

All three intertexts expect readers or viewers to be familiar with *The Journey*, specifically with the scene where Sun Wukong fails to jump out of Buddha's palm. While Pok Kŏil and Han Ungbin mention three actants (monkey, Buddha, palm) to decode the scene, *Tokkaebi* only mentions one, the palm. How can we understand these examples of abbreviated storytelling as means to evaluate knowledge?

While none of the three intertexts mentioned above mainly revolve around *The Journey*, the authors still expect readers or viewers to be familiar with the "jumping out of Buddha's palm" scene from *The Journey*. Pok Kŏil and Han Ungbin refer to the scene to emphasize the feeling of helplessness or powerlessness, which means they approach the scene from the perspective of Sun Wukong who is not able to jump out of Buddha's palm. The powerlessness of the characters is obvious already before the authors mention Sun Wukong, but the allusion to Sun Wukong, if decoded by the reader, indicates the extreme degree of this helplessness. In contrast, Kim Sin in *Tokkaebi* refers to the scene from Buddha's perspective to stress his ubiquitous power. Readers and viewers can only appreciate these allusions to *The Journey* if they are familiar with the "jumping out of Buddha's palm" scene. In other words, if their literary knowledge is sufficient, they will be able to crack the code and gain a deeper understanding of the intertext.

We could wonder how the knowledge of readers can be evaluated if they are alone without anyone who observes their reading experience. In *A Theory of Parody*

45 Pok Kŏil, *Pimyŏng ŭl ch'ajasŏ*, p. 99.
46 Han Ungbin, "Tubŏntchae sangbong", *Chosŏn munhak* 9 (1999), pp. 48–59. Thanks to Benoit Berthelier for suggesting that I look at this short story.
47 Han Ungbin, "Tubŏntchae sangbong", p. 55.

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Linda Hutcheon promises the successful decoder of a parody "an extra fillip"[48] of pleasure for completing his or her part of the meaning circuit. This would also seem to apply to decoding processes in general. In the case of parody, Genette reminds us that the simple understanding of a covert parody never necessitates resorting to the parodied text; it can be read both for itself and in its relation to the parodied text.[49] The parodic is to some degree both mandatory and optional, but it cannot be overlooked without voiding the parodies of a significant dimension.[50] Applied to our three examples above, that means that they can all be understood in their own right, but when they are related to *The Journey* the polysemy of the intertexts is enriched.

We could call the success in decoding the three examples above as intertexts of *The Journey* an act of self-evaluation of knowledge that is rewarded by an extra fillip of pleasure. While the poetry jam in the 17th century served as a means to evaluate the literary knowledge in a small group of poets, the potential self-evaluation of literary knowledge in the second cluster of intertexts is connected to the reading pleasure we can feel when we can connect new nodes in our network of literary knowledge. In other words, while the knowledge evaluation in the 17th century poetry jam helped to strengthen the identity of a concrete "in-group", the self-evaluation of literary knowledge in the second cluster of examples is rather limited tothe readers themselves. Still, I would argue that also this kind of self-evaluation of literary knowledge is related to the feeling of belonging to an "in-group", albeit a relatively abstract one. The idea that we share literary knowledge with other readers might give us the elevating feeling of belonging to an imagined "knowing audience" whose literary knowledge suffices to decode texts that are difficult to crack by "unknowing readers."

In conclusion, I suggest that abbreviated storytelling can be a way to evaluate literary knowledge. This does not mean that the primary and intentional aim of abbreviated storytelling is necessarily to evaluate literary knowledge. As Tangherlini emphasized, "people rarely tell complete stories."[51] Abbreviated storytelling is so much part of our conversations in everyday life, that we might not even be aware of how we include and exclude others through abbreviated storytelling.

48 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms* (Urbana 2000), p. 94.

49 Genette, *Palimpsests*, pp. 396–397.

50 Barbara Wall, "Self-mockery of the Korean Wave (*hallyu*) in the Korean drama *My Love from the Star* and the role of the seventeenth century novel *The Dream of the Nine Clouds*", *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 8 (2016), p. 85.

51 Tim Tangherlini et al., "An Automated Pipeline for the Discovery of Conspiracy and Conspiracy Theory Narrative Frameworks", p. 4.

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Testing Enlightenment and Communicating the Ineffable: *Kanhwa Sŏn* Practices and Poetry in Pre-modern Korea

Sung-Eun Thomas Kim

Introduction

The great traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism that had significant impact on the lives of the people in East Asia were simply referred to as "teachings" (kr. *kyo*, ch. *jiao* 教) in pre-modern times. They involved a whole array of teachings on basic morality to the metaphysical questions of human existence. Given the development and the accumulation of knowledge of these teachings over centuries, it would have taken a lifetime of learning to master the teachings of Confucianism or Buddhism. Neophytes who desired to obtain the teachings entered a community of seekers – the samgha for Buddhists or a *sŏdang* for Confucians – and dedicated a lifetime in pursuit of study and practice.

Generally, the training process of both traditions, after an initial preparatory teaching, takes the student from instructions in conventional knowledge towards absolute knowledge. In fact, the characteristics of the Chosŏn monastic curriculum can be attributed to shared similarities with the Confucian curricular system that was first widely established in the rural Confucian academies (*sŏwŏn* 書院) after the sixteenth century. These rural academies followed the educational system inculcated by Yi Hwang 李滉 (1501–1570) and Yi I 李珥 (1536–1584), two representative Neo-Confucians scholar-officials of the early-Chosŏn period (1392–1600).

The Confucian educational system and the Buddhist monastic curriculum shared similarities in that the curricula followed progressive stages; the Confucian education system starts from the basic lessons in *Elementary Learning* (kr. *Sohak*, ch. *Xiaoxue* 小學), and in a similar way the Buddhist education first text is *Kye ch'oshim hagin mun* 誡初心學人文 (Admonitions to Beginners), which instructs the novices in the basic rules of behavior. Thereafter, Confucian curriculum then progresses to the metaphysical ideas of Neo-Confucianism. In Buddhism, the novice delves into the main curriculum, which is divided into three separate stages where the final stage is a course on the recondite teachings of Huayan and Sŏn Buddhist thought, the acme of Buddhist teachings.[1]

In Buddhism, the novice will then move from a doctrine focused training to a more spiritual focused training, beyond the goal of accumulating knowledge,

1 Lee Jongsu, "Monastic Education and Educational Ideology in the Late Chosŏn", *Journal of Korean Religions* 3, no. 3 (2012), pp. 78–79.

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of manifesting the teachings in mind and body. The ultimate aim of education in doctrinal learning in Buddhism is then followed by an equally strenuous regiment of cultivational practices that aims to realize one's Buddhahood (kr. *pulsŏng*, ch. *foxing* 佛性), as espoused in the teachings of the Sŏn/Chan tradition.[2]

Ever since Siddhartha, the Buddha, attained great enlightenment and taught how he came to be awakened, Buddhist monks and nuns have dedicated their lives to follow in his footsteps. It is claimed that as the Sŏn/Chan tradition developed in China and flourished, the notion of mind-to-mind transmission of teaching was established where the teachings were beyond words, the tools of conceptualization, and beyond conceptual reasoning and discursive thought processes. Then, how do you communicate a realization or express the state of ineffable realization without the conventional system of human communication? How would it be possible to verify and evaluate claims about the experiences of realization?

Due to such barriers, it is the reason why we witness in the history of Chan Buddhism the state of an enlightened mind being expressed in creative ways. This included methods such as "word-less" teachings of using silence or gestures of raising an eyebrow or even striking the student just at the right moment to jolt the mind of the student into enlightenment. Though ironic, this tradition led to the establishment of a genre of literature which consists of a collection of instructive interactions that took place between students and the masters. The use of this collection of instructive "cases" formed the practice of "Sŏn/Chan of observing the critical phrase" (kr. *kanhwa sŏn*, ch. *kanhua chan* 看話禪). Within this tradition, there developed a form of evaluating the state of awakening of the neophyte tested by a form of face-to-face question-and-answer between the master and the student, also referred to as encounter dialogue.

This article will initially focus on a widely accepted monastic educational system that was established in the late-sixteenth century Korea, which was a structured monastic curriculum that was part of an overall scheme of monastic training. It provided the foundational footing of doctrinal learning, and it was based on this precursory training that the practicing student progressed to meditational practices in pursuit of enlightenment. Thereafter, the *kanhwa* tradition will be described, which was adopted into Korea in the twelfth century and practiced as one of the main forms of meditational practices for the purpose of inciting and bringing the practitioners' mind to awakening. In this way, *kanhwa sŏn* was also a form of evaluating the state of a student's mind to determine how far or close they are to enlightenment.

2 In Neo-Confucianism, the aim is to become a sage (kr. *sŏngin*, ch. *shengren* 聖人) living in harmony with the principle of the universe. For a Daoist, the aim is to become a Daoist immortal (kr. *sŏnin*, ch. *xianren* 仙人) who is one with the Way. In this way, body-mind cultivation is commonly shared among all major religious traditions in Korea; Buddhism, Confucianism, shamanism, and new religions such as Tonghak. Donald Baker, *Korean Spirituality* (Honolulu 2008), pp. 96–98, explains such tradition within the religions of Korea as "anthropocentric" practices.

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Lastly, poetry as a method of communicating and verifying the state of enlightenment of monks will be discussed. It is well-known that Buddhist monks have long turned to poetry to express the inexpressible non-discursive thoughts and insights. What is interesting is that the use of poetry by monks to express enlightened thoughts and insights has been a well-known tradition in China, Korea and Japan. Given these characteristics of poetry, Sŏn/Chan poems were often used as a vehicle by which monks expressed their enlightened minds, which was shared with literary companions across boundaries of traditions. It is not surprising that there has been a long connection between Buddhism and poetry and that poet monks (kr. *sisŭng* 詩僧) have been well-known for their poetry skills and sought-out by the poetry enthusiasts, even by the Confucian scholar-officials.

Systems of Monastic Education

The purpose for entering a temple to gain doctrinal training can be divided into two – worldly pursuits and religious enlightenment. When gaining doctrinal training for worldly pursuits, the candidate would be awarded qualifications to become an abbot for the temples of the specific school on successful completion of the state sponsored monastic examinations. According to the *National Code* (*Kyŏnggŭk taejŏn* 經國大典), monastic examinations were divided into either the doctrinal stream or the meditational. For the doctrinal stream, the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (ch. *Huayan jing*, kr. *Hwaŏm kyŏng* 華嚴經) and *Daśabhūmikasūtra-śāstra* (kr. *Sipji ron* 十地論) were the main sutras on which the state examination was based. For the meditational stream, it was the *Transmission of the Lamp Records* (kr. *Chŏndŭng nok* 傳燈錄) and the *Compilation of Examinations of and Verses on Ancient Precedents* (kr. *Sŏnmun yŏmsong* 禪門拈頌). It would be safe to assume that such division and the separate sutras used for the examination would have been the same in the late Koryŏ period.[3]

In this way, the schools were categorized as belonging to either the doctrinal or the meditational tradition and based on this categorization the examination candidate would have been tested on the sutras either from the doctrinal or meditational stream. In addition, the candidate would also be tested on specific sutras determined by the individual schools to which the examinee belonged. Thus, it can be argued that the doctrinal training received by the neophytes were in preparation for the state monastic examinations rather than strictly as part of spiritual development. And it was based on successfully passing these examinations that the monks were qualified to take-on the position of an abbot of temples. However, such system of state monastic examination, in-line with the state anti-Buddhist policies, were abolished late in the early-Chosŏn period, in 1566.

After the dissolution of the state monastic examination, it can be argued that doctrinal training became associated more with spiritual training rather than for

3 Lee Jongsu, "The Establishment of Buddhist Cultivation Centers in Late Joseon Korea", *Korea Journal* 62, no. 2 (2022): p. 38.

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increasing one's worldly standings. Given such drastic changes in the monastic system, the nature of doctrinal study shifted, becoming focused on its use as an essential part in the scheme of spiritual training. Such scheme that was established during the Chosŏn period (1392–1910) is well summarized by the late-sixteenth century master, Hyujŏng 休靜 (1520–1604), known as the pragmatic systematizer of doctrine and practice.[4] Hyujŏng maintained a unique structure of training expressed aptly in his instruction, "leave doctrinal study and enter meditational practice" (*sugyo ipsŏn* 捨教入禪). This is referring to the order of monastic training of doctrinal learning and meditational practice wherein doctrinal learning comes first but the instruction also indicates that what has been learned through words and conceptual notions must be left behind when entering meditational practices. The reason for this will be discussed in the following section on *kanhwa sŏn* but suffice to say that doctrinal training was an essential element which provided the foundation within the overall scheme of monastic training for enlightenment.

It appears that up to the early sixteenth century, individual monasteries managed their own curriculum for training their own monastic members and a standardized monastic education is not known to have been used. However, sixteenth-century printings of Buddhist literature related to monastic education reveal efforts within the monastic community for a standardization of a curriculum.[5] By the seventeenth century there is evidence of a more formal, unified curriculum that was in place. A description of this monastic curriculum known as the *iryŏk kwajŏng* (履歷課程) was given by Yŏngwŏl Ch'ŏnghak 詠月淸學 (1570–1654, hereafter Yŏngwŏl) in early seventeenth century. He describes the monastic curriculum as consisting of a sequence of three stages: the "Fourfold-Texts Course" (*sajipkwa* 四集科), the "Fourfold-Teachings Course" (*sagyogwa* 四教科), and the final "Great-Teaching Course" (*taegyogwa* 大教科).[6]

It appears that the initial three-stage curriculum described by Yŏngwŏl gained wide acceptance. However, in the early seventeenth century one more stage was added to form a four-stage curriculum. Most of the texts used in the added stage were already in circulation by the early seventeenth century. This additional course, "Course for Neophytes" (*sami kwa* 沙彌科), was placed at the very beginning of the three-stage curriculum, right before the Fourfold-Texts Course. We can summarize the four courses as follows:

4 In many ways Hyujŏng continued the monastic training scheme that was initially formulated by the twelfth century Koryŏ period monk Pojo Chinul 普照知訥 (1158–1210) who despite being a Sŏn monk emphasized the importance of doctrinal study in one's path towards enlightenment. Robert E. Buswell Jr., *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul* (Honolulu 1983), p. 201–202.

5 Lee Jongsu, "Monastic Education and Educational Ideology in the Late Chosŏn", p. 69.

6 Yŏngwŏl Ch'ŏnghak summarizes the three courses in his "Sajipsagyo chŏndŭng yŏmsong hwaŏm 四集四教傳燈拈頌華嚴 (Fourfold Texts, Fourfold Teachings, Transmission of the Lamp, Analyses and Verses, and Huayan)", *Han'guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ* no. 159, vol. 8, 234b21–235b4.

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1. The Course for Neophytes is comprised of the *Kye ch'oshim hagin mun* 誡初心學人文 (Admonitions to Beginners), *Palsim suhaeng chang* 發心修行章 (Inspiring Yourself to Practice), *Chagyŏng mun* 自警文 (Admonitions to Oneself), and *Zimen jingxun* 緇門警訓 (Admonitions to the monastic community).
2. The Fourfold-Texts Course seeks enlightenment through gradual cultivation and investigating the phrase (*ch'amgu* 參句), a practice that focuses on understanding the core points of the following prescribed scriptures: *Chanyuan zhuquan ji duxu* 禪源諸詮集都序 (Preface to the Collection of Chan Sources), *Dahui shuzhuang* 大慧書狀 (Letters of Dahui), *Chanyao* 禪要 (Essentials of Chan), and *Pŏpchip pyŏrhaengnok chŏryo pyŏng'ip sagi* 法集別行錄節要并入私記 (Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes).
3. The aim of the Fourfold-Teachings Course is to awaken to the principles of the teachings by way of studying scriptures. The Fourfold-Teachings Course focuses on the *Yuanjue jing* 圓覺經 (Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment), the *Diamond Sūtra*, *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, and the *Lotus Sūtra*.[7]
4. The final stage, the Great-Teaching Course, consists of examining the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp) and the *Sŏnmun yŏmsong chip* 禪門拈頌集 (Compilation of Analyses and Verses [on Ancient Precedents] of the Sŏn School).[8]

Yŏngwŏl explains that students will learn the fundamentals of the Sŏn of the patriarchs and come to know the correct direction of cultivation by following the curriculum. This newly developed four-stage curriculum became generally accepted as a monastic curriculum by the various Chosŏn Buddhist schools and was later established by the modern monastic community in Korea as a standard monastic curriculum.[9]

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7 In addition, somewhere in the development of the curriculum from the seventeenth century the *Lotus Sūtra* was replaced with the *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論 (Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna).

8 *Han'guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ* no. 159, vol. 8, 234b21–235b4. See also Hee-Sung Keel, *Chinul: The Founder of the Korean Sŏn Tradition* (Berkeley 1984), pp. 175–176, where he divides the courses over four years and outlines all the Buddhist scriptures that are studied in the years one to four.

9 See Lee Jongsu, "Monastic Education and Educational Ideology in the Late Chosŏn", pp. 68–71; Kim Yongtae, "Chosŏn hugi pulgyo munhŏn ŭi kach'i wa sŏn'gwa kyoŭi ijungju. 'Sŏn'ga kwigam' kwa 'Kisillonso p'ilssakki hoep'yŏn' ŭl chungsim ŭro", *Han'guk sasang sahak* 58 (2018), pp. 160–167. At the same time that the standardization of monastic education occurred, a new system of cultivation was developed, which harmonized the three main traditions of monastic practices–meditation (Sŏn), doctrinal study (Kyo), and recitation of the name of Amitābha Buddha, otherwise referred to as *yŏmbul* 念佛. This new system of practice became generally accepted among the Buddhist communities and is known as the three paths of cultivation (*sammun suhak* 三門修學). This signalled the adoption of Pure Land chanting as a practice integral to the perfection of self-cultivation and as a practice that was considered no less effective than meditation in achieving enlightenment, see Kim Yongtae, "Buddhism and the Afterlife in the Late Joseon Dynasty: Leading Souls to the Afterlife in a Confucian Society", *Korea Journal* 60, no. 4 (2020), pp. 278–280.

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The monastic program was designed to move the neophyte through conventional knowledge which follows the method of doctrinal study in the Kyo tradition. This provides the grounding for the student to move onto the next phase of Sŏn practices or meditational training. In other words, students' progress from doctrinal study to meditational practice, or *sugyo ipsŏn* as explained. This is the idea that the monastics firstly engaged in doctrinal study and once the practitioner has completed that stage he or she needs to move-on to the next level of meditation on absolute reality. However, in absolute reality, conventional understanding acts as an inhibitor in approaching absolute reality rather than assisting the neophyte. For this reason, the practitioners must cleanse him or herself of the conventional knowledge that was obtained through the many years of doctrinal study. Such practice which cleanses the practitioner's mind of conceptual thoughts and helps to dwell in absolute reality is *kanhwa sŏn*, or "Sŏn of observing the critical phrase."

Kanhwa sŏn as a Way to Reach the Ineffable

Kanhwa sŏn, also referred to as *kong'an* (ch. *gong'an* 公案) practice, was first adopted into Korea in the twelfth century when it was incorporated as part of the monastic practices. Ever since that time, it has become a main form of practice that became popular as a "short-cut" method in the repertoire of cultivational methods.[10] Pojo Chinul 普照知訥 (1158–1210, hereafter Chinul), the late-twelfth century Korean monk, was the first in Korea to adopt and systematize the method of practice as outlined in his *Treatise on Resolving Doubts About Observing the Hwadu* (*Kanhwa kyŏrŭiron* 看話決疑論) which was published posthumously in 1215. Chinul adopted *kanhwa sŏn* late in his life after reading the works of Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), the Chinese systemizer of *kanhwa* practice. Chinul saw the advantages as an effective "short-cut" method in the monastic cultivational scheme. In the previous scheme, the practitioner was expected to go through the process of "understanding enlightenment" (*hae'o* 解悟) and "gradual cultivation" (*chŏmsu* 漸修) and eventually reach "realization-enlightenment" (*chŭng'o* 證悟) which was indeed a gruelling long process that may take several lifetimes. Chinul felt that the new method cut directly to the last stage of realization-enlightenment and effectively allowed the practitioners to skip the initial stages of understanding enlightenment and gradual cultivation.[11] This practice seems to have been all the more emphasized from the time of Chinul's disciple Chin'gak Hyesim 眞覺慧諶 (1178–1234, hereafter Hyesim) when *kanhwa sŏn* became the predominate practice

10 Chinul is a significant figure in the systemization of thought and practice in relation to the progression towards the state of awakening. His system of thought and practice have shaped monastic curriculum and methods of practice from his time up to modern times, especially in the practice of *kanhwa sŏn*. Robert Buswell has been the most prominent Western scholar who has discussed Chinul, his life of practice and his thought. See Robert E. Buswell Jr, *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea* (New Jersey 1992).

11 Keel discusses Chinul's ideas in his adoption of *kanhwa* practices. See Keel, *Chinul: The Founder of the Korean Sŏn Tradition*, pp. 146–155.

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and later eventually throughout the Chosŏn period and which is now fully adopted by the largest order in Korea, the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. Even for the great sixteenth century master Hyujŏng, who is known perhaps as the greatest Sŏn master of the Chosŏn period, *kanhwa sŏn* was fully adopted as a critical method of monastic practice.[12]

Kanhwa sŏn practice mostly consist of methods that bring the student's mind to a level that transcends conventional notions and conceptual thought processes. In this sense wordless expressions were used by masters to express their enlightened minds. The *kanhwa sŏn* tradition goes back to the collection of literature that described the actions and teachings of forefathers of the Linji school, the name originating from the founding Chinese patriarch, Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 867), who was well-known for his eccentric and profound methods of pedagogy. It is not unusual that the enlightened Sŏn masters resorted to wordless actions in their instructions of students such as beatings, shouts, or "pregnant pauses." A well-known example is of the Chinese master Nanquan Puyuan 南泉普願 (748–835)[13] who killed a cat after monastic students were lost with words when Nanquan asked them to say a word of Chan. After the grim incident a fellow monk, Zhaozhou Congshen 趙州從諗 (778–897), understanding the intent of Nanquan, responded from his state of an enlightened mind with a wordless action – he took off his sandal and placed it on his head, as described in the following:

> Nanquan kills the cat
> Once Nanquan noticed monks of the eastern and western halls disputing about a cat. Then he took the cat and announced, "If anyone talks, I will not kill him." Nobody pronounced a word. Then Nanquan ripped the cat apart. "Nanquan related what happened to Zhaozhou and asked what he would have done if he had been present at that time. Zhou took off his straw sandals, put them on his head, and left the hall. "If you had been there, the cat would still be alive," Nanquan exclaimed.[14]

Wordless actions are adopted because such a level of understanding is believed to be beyond discursive thought processes and conceptualizing words. Another example is of Koryŏ period monk Chinul, who was the initial adopter of *kanhwa* practice as a pedagogical method in Korea. Here, the tradition of using non-ver-

12 The thought and practice of *kanhwa sŏn* that was formulated by Chinul were wholly accepted and espoused by Hyujŏng and was only slightly modified. See Hyujŏng, *Samga gwigam*, trans. Nakhun Sŏng (Seoul 1977).

13 Nanquan was a disciple of the famous Jiangxi monk, Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–788), famous for his wordless teachings.

14 *Gateless Gate*, Case no. 14; requote from Alexander Kabanoff, "Ikkyu and Koans", in *The Kōan: Text and Context in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (New York 2000), p. 222. *Gateless Gate* (ch. *Wumenguan* 無門關, 1229) is a collection of 48 teachings by the Song period monk Wumen Jikai (無門慧開, d.u.). Other well-known *kong'an* collections are *Recorded Sayings* (ch. *Yulu* 語錄) and *Lamp Records* (ch. *Denglu* 燈錄), and the *Blue Cliff Record* (ch. *Biyanlu* 碧巖錄, 1128).

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bal actions is quite evident in the encounter between Chinul and his foremost student, Hyesim. The encounter took place during when Chinul was giving a teaching as follows:

> Once Chinul brought up Zhaozhou's *hwadu* – a dog has no Buddha-nature– and questioned his students about the ten defects to its contemplation delineated by Dahui. The assembly had no answer.
> But Hyesim replied, "A person with three kinds of defects can comprehend this meaning."
> The national master asked, "Where does a person with three kinds of defects breathe out?"
> Master Hyesim struck the window once with his hand.
> The national master laughed heartily. When he returned to the master's room, Chinul secretly called upon him, and spoke further with him.[15]

Here, the interaction between Chinul and Hyesim consisted of a combination of both verbal and non-verbal communication. The interaction depicts Hyesim to be able to respond in kind in cryptic form of communication with Chinul's level of enlightenment, and the final response of striking the window was an indication of having "passed" the questioning and satisfied Chinul who expressed his approval with a hearty laugh.

While these records of wordless teachings and iconoclastic interactions seem to be paradigmatic of *kanhwa sŏn*, the use of words and language in most cases cannot be separated from the Buddhist traditions, even the anti-lingual tradition of *kanhwa sŏn*.[16] I argue that though this is indeed true for the scholastic school (*kyojong* 教宗) where the study of texts is fundamental in its curriculum and instructions, it also applies to the meditation school (*sŏnjong* 禪宗), and particularly in the practice of *kanhwa sŏn* where conceptual terms and language are used differently. The purpose of practicing *kanhwa sŏn* is that it removes the "defects of conceptual understanding so that you can find the living road that leads to salvation."[17] This means that it cleanses the deluding effects of conceptualizing words. Nonetheless, as ironic as it may seem, the practice of *kanhwa sŏn* cannot be carried out in the absence of words. The use of words and language is very much part of *kanhwa* practices as ques or reference points which is part of a different method of communication. Such use would admittedly be unconventional and cryptic – what I would refer to as meta-semantic and pseudo-lingual.

15 Hyesim stele, requoted from Buswell, *The Korean Approach to Zen*, pp. 31–32.
16 It has been argued that the neophyte must cross the river of conceptual learning on the boat of doctrinal studies, and once the river has been crossed, it is claimed that those letters and words must be shed.
17 Robert E. Jr. Buswell, "Chinul's Systematization of Chinese Meditative Techniques in Korean Sŏn Buddhism", in *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu 1986), p. 220.

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Kanhwa Sŏn: Cognizance of the Ineffable

In the *kanhwa* practices, it is described that students meditate on a *kong'an* – stories about the direct instructions of the early masters that were transmitted and drawn upon as teaching devices. This became a common method used within the Linji school and came to be collected into large anthologies. Buswell describes that these stories came to be called "public case records," because they were made to be publically known to prevent "private understanding and are guaranteed to be in harmony with what the Buddhas and patriarchs would say."[18]

More specifically, meditating on a *kong'an* is done by focusing on the *hwadu* 話頭, literally "head of speech," which can be taken as "the primary topic of the entire situation set out in a complete *kong'an*",[19] or simply as a critical phrase. In *hwadu* practice, these heads of speech or topics were used to incite and lead the students beyond the boundaries of language and beyond the limits of conceptual thought.

> [T]he *hwadu* acts as a purification device which sweeps the mind free of all its conceptualizing activities and leaves it clear, attentive, and calm – the ideal meditative state. Cessation of the discriminative processes of thought strips the mind of its interest in the sense-experiences of the ordinary world and renders it receptive to the influence of the unconditioned.[20]

In the process of bringing the students to the brink of reality as he or she knows it, because *kanhwa sŏn* is practiced in the form of question-response format, it is often used to judge how far the student has progressed to becoming enlightened. The *kong'an* practice takes place in a literal "question-and-answer Sŏn" (kr. *sŏn muntap* 禪問答) or what is often described as the "encounter dialogue."[21] The disciple is given a *kong'an* by his or her master in this face-to-face meeting and the student is expected to respond appropriately to the presented *kong'an*. These meetings will take place at times when the student thinks he or she has made progress in solving the *kong'an*. This one-to-one relationship is one of mentoring and instruction through which the disciple's non-discursive cognition is developed and is directed closer towards a realization of the *kong'an*. Such interaction can be highly idiosyncratic based on the judgement of the master about which method would be the most effective in making the student come closer to the realization of the *kong'an*.

Some of the important characteristic elements of this encounter dialogue are that it is unscripted and spontaneous where intuitive cognizance is the aim, as opposed to the "figuring out" that is based on discursive thought processes. In

18 Buswell, *The Korean Approach to Zen*, p. 66.
19 Ibid., pp. 66–67.
20 Ibid., p. 67.
21 In McRae's explanation of the dynamics of the "encounter dialogue," he highlights the orality of these encounters which give it the spontaneous fluidity as opposed to the "fixity of written language" John R. McRae, "The Antecedents of Encounter Dialogue in Chinese Ch'an Buddhism", in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (New York 2000), pp. 47–48.

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this sense the sudden and intuitive realization of the *kong'an* and not by means of discursive thoughts is an indication that the student is closer to awakening, the end goal.

One should note that there is not a predetermined "correct" answer or response in *kong'an* practice. Rather the appropriateness and fit of the response in an encounter dialogue seems highly fluid and situational. The response might vary depending on the setting and the dynamics of the interaction such that there is no logically correct response for a given *kong'an*. What is important is that the disciple is alert to the state of the mind of the master and is able to respond and communicate at the same state and level of intuitive cognizance. Thus, the responses of the enlightened disciple are fitting to the interjection of a *kong'an* by the master.

The verification of the state of realization of the *kong'an* and the verification of the awakened state of the disciple is determined based on a highly personal judgement by the master in the interaction. This verification is taken as a proof of the awakened state of the disciple without which the student's awakened state cannot be publically recognized. Upon the judgement that the student has realized the *kong'an*, and thus having gained awakening, the master presents the student with a seal of recognition (*in'ga* 印可) of his or her enlightened state of mind.

Using Words without Using its Meaning[22]

This aversion towards discursive thinking and conceptualizing words and the attempt to leave such mode of instruction or relaying of knowledge is fundamental in examples of *kanhwa sŏn* lessons. Below is a description of a scene of *kanhwa sŏn* practice where a student who claimed to be enlightened was tested by his master. It is a story of Man'gong 滿空 (1872–1946), a disciple of the famous Sŏn master Kyŏnghŏ Sŏngu 鏡虛惺牛 (1849–1912, hereafter Kyŏnghŏ), described by Mu Soeng. In the scene, Man'gong claims to have penetrated the nature of all things and attained enlightenment. Master Kyŏnghŏ proceeds to tests this student as follows:

22 The essence in the practice of *kong'an* is specifically explained by Chinul in his *Resolving Doubts about Observing the Hwadu* (*Kanhwa gyŏrŭi ron* 看話決疑論), which was published posthumously in 1215 by his disciple and successor Hyesim. What is important is that the practitioner should not "investigate the meaning" (*ch'amŭi* 參意) but must rather "investigate the word" (*ch'amgu* 參句). From there, when investigating the word, it is considered that "living words" (*hwalgu* 活句) are investigated whereas when investigating the meaning, dead words (*sagu* 死句) are investigated. When words are dead, it means that they make discursive sense and that the conceptual meaning of the words are depended on in forming a world built on concepts. However, because such use of words make sense, this does not create doubt in the mind which is necessary in prodding the student's mind towards enlightenment. However, when words are living, it is said to be "tasteless" (*mumi* 無味), an essential element in creating doubt. The tastelessness of the word makes it not possible for the mind to make any conceptual connections with the word and leads to the emergence of doubt in the practitioner's mind. This great doubt then drives the mind of the practitioner to the edges of discursive thoughts and into the non-conceptual dimensions. Part of this topic is discussed in Robert E. Buswell Jr., "Pojo Chinul 普照知訥 and the Sudden-Gradual Issue: *Kanhwa* Sŏn and Korean Buddhist Soteriology", *Pulgyo hakpo* 66 (2013): pp. 181–182.

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> "Then what is the nature of all things?"
> Man'gong replies, "I can see right through the wall and the roof…"
> Kyŏnghŏ asks, "Is this the truth?"
> "Yes, I have no hindrance at all."
> The master took his Zen stick and gave Man'gong a hard whack on the head. "Is there any hindrance now?"
> Man'gong was astonished. His eyes bulged, his face flushed, and the wall became solid again.
> The master asked, "Where did your truth go?"
> "I don't know. Please teach me."
> "What *kong'an* are you working on?"
> Man'gong replied, [the *kong'an*] "Where does the One return?"
> "Do you understand [what is] One?" The master explained, "You must first understand [the] One. What you saw was an illusion. Don't be led astray by it."[23]

Here, Man'gong felt that he had a break-through experience of the *kong'an* and sought the verification of his master. However, Kyŏnghŏ on examining Man'gong makes a judgement that Man'gong has not attained enlightenment and instructs him with a caution, "Don't be led astray by it [the illusion]." Three years after when Man'gong was attending a morning prayer he heard the phrase, "If you wish to understand all Buddhas of the past, present, and future, you must perceive that the whole universe is created by the Mind alone." Man'gong experienced sudden awakening and realized that,

> … all the Buddhas dwell in a single sound. He clapped his hands, laughed and sang the following verse of enlightenment:
>
> The true nature of empty mountain is beyond the million years and past and future.
> White cloud, cool wind, come and go by themselves endlessly.
> Why did Bodhidharma come to China?
> The rooster cries before dawn and then the sun rises over the horizon.[24]

In the use of poetry in this instance, we can witness the intimate connectedness of the awakening experience and the use of poetry in communicating that state of the mind. Poetry can be said to be essential which at least gives an enlightened person a method to express to others his or her state of mind. In this way it works similar to one's response to a *kong'an* where it is presented as an evidence of one's attainment of awakening. In other words, poetry is a method of verifying, or test-

23 Mu Soeng, "Sŏn Master Man'gong and Cogitations of a Colonized Religion", in *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*, ed. Jin Y. Park (Albany 2010), p. 162.
24 Mu Soeng, 2010, p. 163.

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ing one's attainment of an awakened state of mind. I now turn to the genre of poetry as a method of expressing one's state of awakening.

Poetry as Expressions of Enlightenment

Poetry has long been one of the methods by which not only Chan masters but even Confucian literati have expressed in words ineffable thoughts and emotions and to describe transcendent spiritual experiences.[25] That is because, not unlike the practice of *kanhwa sŏn*, unconventional and cryptic use of words and language are the mainstays of poetry where conventional rules of syntax and semantics are bent and flouted. The use of poetry as a means of expressing one's state of enlightenment goes back to early developments in Buddhism in China. The most famous Buddhist enlightenment poem is the mind poem by the famous Dajian Huineng 大鑒惠能 (638–713), the sixth patriarch of the Sŏn/Chan school. The poem was written in response to the fifth patriarch's challenge to compose a poem as a way to test who was enlightened among the disciples. Based on the test of poetry composition, whomever the fifth patriarch judges to be enlightened, this person will be named the genealogical successor as the sixth patriarch of the Chan school.

Despite that Huineng was illiterate, he at least was able to recite it and have someone inscribe it, which was said to be in response to a poem by Yuquan Shenxiu 玉泉神秀 (606?–706) on the emptiness of the mind. The two poems became one of the most iconic poems in Buddhist history. Below are the two poems translated by Dumoulin.[26]

> Shenxiu
> The body is the Bodhi tree,
> The mind is like a clear mirror.
> At all times we must strive to polish it,
> And must not let the dust collect.
>
> Huineng
> Originally there is no tree of enlightenment,
> Nor is there a stand with a clear mirror.
> From the beginning not one thing exists;
> Where, then, is a grain of dust to cling?

This is one of the foremost examples of the use of poetry to communicate one's awakened state of mind and according to this narrative, the fifth patriarch, Hongren 弘忍 (601–674), came to the judgement that Huineng's mind was awakened

25 Mary Anne Cartelli in her book *The Five-Colored Clouds of Mount Wutai: Poem from Dunhuang* (Boston 2013), describes how Mount Wutai became a focal point that brought together the traditions of Taoism and Buddhism and Chinese poetry as depicted in the manuscripts dating to the Tang and the Five Dynasties periods.

26 Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History Volume 1: India and China* (Bloomington, Indiana 2005), pp. 132–133.

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while Shenxiu's was not fully awakened. It was Shenxiu who was expected to be chosen as the sixth patriarch since he was the most highly regarded monk by many. Huineng, on the other hand, was yet a novice who was not even literate and was confined to doing monastery kitchen work. The fifth patriarch called on Huineng to come to his room one evening and passed on his monastic robe and almsbowl as a form of a seal of recognition of his enlightenment and also as a sign of transmission of the lineage from Hongren. Huineng then secretly left the monastery that evening fearing trouble if he stayed.

Of course, the literary practice of poetry composition among the monks has been quite common within the Buddhist tradition. There are various genre of poems but here it would be appropriate to discuss poems related to enlightenment, particularly those written after an experience of awakening, most likely as an expression of the awakened state of mind, but equally important as a verification of one's enlightened state within the monastic community.

Here, I discuss cases in Korean Buddhism of poems composed shortly after the awakening experience. I will discuss two famous monks from the Chosŏn period who are known for their extensive writings. The first is arguably the most famous monk of the late Chosŏn period, Hyujŏng, also known for having organized the monk militia during the Great East Asian War (1592–1598) at the request of King Injo 仁祖 (1567–1608). Hyujŏng's biographical record on his memorial stele indicates that he was initially reared in the Confucian tradition from early age. It was during the time of his despair after failing to pass the state examination that he turned to Buddhism.

Hyujŏng has an awakening experience while passing through a village on his travel after he becomes a monk. At the time, Hyujŏng hears a cock crow at noon and suddenly experiences awakening, after which Hyujŏng writes,

> Though the hair turns grey, the mind does not age;
> The ancient masters have already told us this secret.
> Having heard [the sound] of the one rooster crow;
> The work of a great man has already been accomplished![27]

The second example is of the great late-Chosŏn Sŏn master Kyŏnghŏ. He lived through the beginning of the colonization of Korea by Japan and passed away soon after the Japanese government officially annexed Korea in 1910. Kyŏnghŏ's enlightenment poem is titled "Odoga" 悟道歌 or "Way of Enlightenment Song."

27 *Haenam Taehŭngsa Ch'onghŏdang Hyujŏng taesa pimun* 海南大興寺淸虛堂休靜大師碑文 (Great Master Ch'onghŏdang Hyujŏng of Haenam Taehŭng Monastery stele inscription, 1647). Yi Chigwan (ed.), *Kyogam yŏkchu yŏkdae kosŭng pimun (Chosŏn p'yŏn 1)* (Seoul 1999), p. 247.

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I look all around but no one.
Who will pass-on their almsbowl?[28]
Who will pass-on their almsbowl?
I look all around but no one.[29]

As noted in the above, these enlightenment poems were equally important as communications of the state of the mind to fellow monks, and likely even to the greater lay audience. By communicating the fundamental essence of one's awakening experience to others, one is also placing oneself under the scrutiny of others and their evaluation. However, just as *kanhwa* practices have done, enlightenment poems are communicated at the level of what I would say, meta-semantics, or related to the abstract messages of words, and at times using pseudo-language such as gestures, communicate a thought or an emotion with fundamentally different set of linguistic principles. This applies to works of poetry from other traditions, such as Confucianism and Taoism. In fact, poetry was a common literary tradition of literati no-matter whether one is a monk or a Confucian scholar or a Daoist priest.

In the history of Korean Buddhism there has been a long and rich literary culture of poetry. Especially during the Chosŏn period which is known as a time of Buddhist suppression, there remains a rich literary supply of poetry authored by Chosŏn monks, which were often times exchanged with Confucian literati or scholar-officials.[30] What is interesting regarding the use of poetry as a form of communicating enlightened states is its popular adoption within the circle of Confucian literati for "play" with similar thoughts of the ineffable. It appears that the mode of testing, or communicating the state of deep realization, which underlies the practice of *kanhwa sŏn* was adopted into the popular practice of what is called *such'ang* 酬唱 (parleying recitation).[31] This practice was popular among the Confucian scholar-officials and literati, who often gathered at temples and exchanged poetry as a form of play over drinks of alcohol, and at times together with poet monks. This popularity and shared appreciation of poetry and its exchanges seems natural all the more given that poetry societies often gathered at Buddhist temples that were usually located in the mountains and whose members included monks.

Of course, the difference, however, would be the difficulty in comparing the level of intensity of the realization experience of Buddhist enlightenment with these meta-semantic play of *such'ang*. Nonetheless, the poems of *such'ang* take enjoyment

28 This phrase can easily be translated as "To whom can I pass-on [my] almsbowl?"
29 "Odoga" 悟道歌 in *Kyŏnghŏ chip*, in *Han'guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ* no. 283 Vol. 11, p.628c01.
30 Yi Chongch'an in his anthology of Korean Buddhist poems, *Han'guk pulgyo ga si'munhak saron* (Seoul 1993), describes Buddhist poetic forms including sūtras and gāthās that date back to the Silla period (57BCE–935) and poetry composed by monks up to the Chosŏn period.
31 This compound is interesting in that the second character *ch'ang* 唱 means to sing or to speak in a loud voice. The first character *su* 酬 has the meaning to respond or to offer a drink of alcohol or to pass around a drinking cup. In fact, drinking appears to be an intimate part of the gatherings for *such'ang*.

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in dwelling in the realm of meta-semantics and while maintaining elements of literary play. Furthermore, sharing a poem as a form of communication of intense and profound insight elicits a similar or corresponding response from the person to whom the poem is directed, just like the Buddhist encounter dialogue.

Arguably, there is much shared elements between Buddhist poems and these Confucian *such'ang* literary forms. Similar to *kanhwa* practices, the uniqueness of these poetry exchanges lies in their spontaneous composition that reflects intuitive realization and its high appeal over logical and discursive understanding. There are further shared similarities between the spontaneous give-and-take poetic composition and recitation with Sŏn encounter dialogues. By responding with an extemporaneously composed poem, it is both to affirm one's cognizance of the intuitive play and also to participate in the sense and mood of the play. It is as if an enlightened student were communicating their perceptions of the ineffable and affirming their intuitive insight into the *kong'an*, provided by their masters, except in the case of the Confucian literati, there was no supervising master.

The basis of *kanhwa sŏn* is that the master-disciple exchanges are purely unscripted and the responses arise from intuitive realization and not conceptualizing thought processes. The answer to the *kong'an* must arise spontaneously from insightful realizations which demonstrates an intuitive cognizance.[32] In the poetic exchanges, there is no single right answer but the correct response poem not only fits the original stanza while maintaining the meter and rhyme of the preceding poem, but more importantly, it also had to carry the mood and express the realization of the insight as one participated in the play of poetic recitation.

It would seem that such an environment of sharing and exchange have laid the circumstances, at least in the literary culture, for giving and receiving influences and adopting elements between Buddhism and Confucianism. The above provided the breeding ground for the exchange and adoption of elements of *kanhwa* into the literary culture of the Chosŏn elites and from this we can surmise to some extent how elements from *kanhwa sŏn* practices became adopted into the practice of poetry exchanges that took place as a form of communicating the ineffable in a face-to-face interaction.[33]

32 Keel's classical work discusses the benefits of *kanhwa sŏn* as outlined by the Korean monk, Chinul. Chinul explains that *kanhwa sŏn* methods was effective in having the mind transcend beyond the level of conceptual thought, and cutting directly to "realization-enlightenment" without going through the process of "understanding enlightenment" and "gradual cultivation." See Keel, *Chinul: The Founder of the Korean Sŏn Tradition*, pp. 146–155.

33 There are shared educational backgrounds of elite monks and Confucian literati. For example, Hyujŏng, an elite Chosŏn period monk was first reared in the Confucian tradition. It was after his failure to pass the state literary examination that he decided to become a Buddhist monk and entered a monastery. This may lead to such common denominator as shared socio-cultural foundation of Buddhist monks and Confucian literati.

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Concluding Remarks

As ironic as it may seem, the practice of *kanhwa sŏn* is the use of words to express what purportedly cannot be communicated with words. A similar form of practice is the use of poems to communicate mystical and indescribable experiences, also in the various traditions including Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Given the commonality in communicating the ineffable, it is not a surprise that we witness elements of *kanhwa sŏn* practices that have been adopted into the popular literary practice of the Confucian elites, known as *such'ang*, or "parleying recitation." This is the leisurely practice of sharing poems composed ad hoc at literary gatherings usually at Buddhist temples.

Between these two forms of practices, the element of testing plays an important role. In *kanhwa sŏn*, testing is done in order to verify the state of enlightenment of the practitioner's mind. In the literary practice of poetry composition, a milder version of testing is part of the enjoyment in sharing the nuanced mood and insight contained in the poems and being able to respond in kind with one's own poem.

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Poems Leading to Marriage: Another "Examination" in *kodae sosŏl*

Miriam Löwensteinová

Introduction

Poetry has undoubtedly always held a prominent position in East Asian cultures. The literati, as part of their education, learned how to write several different kinds of poems, and poetry was an important part of the social life of elites. Poems were a pathway for scholars to gain glory and respect.[1] Poetry had strict rules and maxims, poems were discussed in *sihwa* 詩話 anecdotes,[2] and poems in some genres contained forewords, explaining how the work was composed. Through poetry it was possible to evoke natural scenery, refer to bad rule, or react to classical works. Poets referred to their predecessors by citing earlier authors and borrowing motifs. Comprehensive and short manuals gave instructions for composing good poetry. Ambitious literati searched for inspiration in the poetic traditions of neighbouring countries and in their own. Philosophy and moral lessons were written in verse. Poems were composed during official missions; admonitions were recorded in poetic form. Poems mocked famous people and their not very successful works, pointing out errors, plagiarism, and forced originality.[3]

In his successful novel *Siin* (The Poet), Yi Munyŏl summarized the general concept of poetry as follows:

> For him [the poet], poetry was "a means by which those above teach those below, while those below satirize the faults of those above" and at the same time "a way to show the laws of conjugal life, promote veneration of parents, strengthen family ties, and bring beauty to edification," as well as an art "using metaphors to suggest other similar things, whereby the rise and decline of customs may be observed, each person's inner resources may be refined and improved, while faults in the government of those above may be reproved." Poetry was a guide to what was right and good, the way for

1 During the Koryŏ dynasty, one possible type of state examination is composing poetry.

2 *Sihwa* (disputations on poetry) originated in China. The first *sihwa* were written during the Koryŏ period. The most famous were composed by Yi Kyubo 李奎報 (1168–1241) and Yi Illo 李仁老 (1152–1220).

3 See, for example, Yi Kyubo's *Paegun sosŏl* 白雲小說.

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> a gentleman to gain that name, something with which to polish one's true nature, and express inner thoughts.[4]

The literati commonly used poems in their everyday communication. They did so in a 'serious' manner, in 'dialogue' with the previous generations of poets, but also as a way to pass the time. Poetic dialogues were a form of popular entertainment, whether they were written down or preserved in oral legends. Illustrative of this is the famous Chinese novel *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber) written by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1710–1765) in the eighteenth century, which includes many scenes depicting poetry sessions. For instance, composing poetry is vividly described in Chapter 37, in which a poetic society is founded. Here, the members agree upon where meetings will be held in the future; who will be in charge of selecting themes, forms, and rhymes; who will write down the poems; and how these poems will be evaluated. Thus, the composing of poetry acquires a frame and prerequisites.

Poetry was always connected with prestige, and therefore, competitions were held. In these contests, the authors would try to prove their importance and exceptionality. In chronicles, legends, and popular stories we encounter many stories in which a king or queen confirms his or her status by way of a poem (e.g., Queen Chindŏk's 眞德 [r. 647–654] poem to the Tang emperor),[5] or wards off peril (e.g., Ŭlchi Mundŏk's poem).[6] Elsewhere, we find poems that exorcize a comet, two suns in the sky, or the demon of illness (*hyangga* 鄕歌 poetry).[7] There are also many stories in which people compose poems, becoming equal with the great Chinese literati and passing state examinations.[8]

Poetry in *kodae sosŏl* 古代小說: An Instrument for Communication

Poetry penetrated prosaic genres. Korean prose from the tenth to nineteenth centuries often features a protagonist who, on the way to success and glory, composes poetry. Surprisingly though, this act has almost no connection to the state exams, which the main hero seems to pass without problem every time. Instead, poetry is a central motif in narratives recounting a male protagonist's courting of a girl, whom he marries at the end of the story. In other stories, girls perform poetic dialogues

4 Yi Munyŏl, *Siin* (Seoul 1994), p. 145. Cited after Yi Munyol, *The Poet*. Translated by Chong-wha Chung and Brother Anthony of Taizé (London 1994), p. 115.

5 *Samguk sagi*, sang 5:138.

6 *Samguk sagi*, ha 44:399.

7 *Hyangga* poetry was written during the Silla and Unified Silla period (sixth to tenth centuries) and recorded during Koryŏ time in the *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of Three Kingdoms) chronicle and *Kyunyŏ chŏn* 均如傳 (The Biography of Master Kyunyŏ). Some *hyangga* from the *Samguk yusa* refer to exorcism, which supports the thesis about their originally magical purpose.

8 *Kwagŏ* poems (*kwasi* 科時) were a special subgenre of poetry. Taking the form of a manual, they contained the most famous poems as models for those taking the state examinations. However, *kwasi* were frequently written on the request of mediocre literati, who needed to be authors of good poetry to prove their status.

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Fig. 9: Illustration of Ch'unhyang's lover discovering poetry books in her house

or monologues, in which they choose their future partners. Naturally, such situations were unrealistic, as freely picking one's partner was not possible in medieval Korean society and composing poetry was not a part of women's everyday lives.[9] Works of fiction, however, allow the impossible.[10] Such fictitious situations can be

9 Women during the Chosŏn era were not familiar with writing poetry in the way that Chinese and Japanese women were. There were not many female poets, except for some *kisaeng* 妓生, educated to be companions of the literati. We can hardly speculate how poetry was composed in the "inner rooms" and how common it was.

10 The genre was considered low, not suited for educational purposes, even harmful, written by women and consumed by women.

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understood as "possible worlds,"[11] as dreams and reflections of romantic wishes. The *kodae sosŏl* genre is romantic through and through, in its protagonists, plots, and conclusions (marriage as a happy ending, or suicide when marriage is not possible). As the protagonists choose their partners, they write poems. Musical or poetic dialogues are featured in all scenes depicting the different phases of an early relationship: the meeting proposal, the first meeting, wooing, and even erotic scenes.

This essay concentrates on the most typical and frequent situations in which poetry composition appears as a fixed romantic motif in *kodae sosŏl* texts, including writing poems to be exchanged with a would-be romantic partner and love-making (the stories of Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn 崔致遠, 857–?).[12] The paper also explores the use of poems as proof of a woman's quality in such novels like Kim Manjung's 金萬重 (1637–1692) *Kuunmong* 九雲夢 (Nine Cloud Dream),[13] where poems are a precondition for making love and getting married, for both the male and female protagonists. Another similar, yet less frequent motif is that of the protagonist being examined about their knowledge of famous musical compositions. Stories with this theme also have a stable structure and a cathartic conclusion.

It must be stressed that all poetical and musical examinations serve to confirm a pre-chosen partner, who may have been picked by the author, the mother or father of the future bride or groom, a matchmaker (*maep'a* 媒婆), or another person. Nowhere in this genre do we encounter a situation in which a protagonist's incapability to compose poetry or sing results in being rejected by a bride or a bridegroom. In these texts, "exam" takers are always well prepared, except for in one case, which I will mention later. Again, this does not correspond with reality but with the romanticized conventions of the genre, in which all protagonists are gifted with many talents. Nevertheless, the poems that they produce are not a part of the story due to their high quality. Although referred to as exceptional in the prose, these poems are formal, mainly regular quatrains. The more literal the prose is, the more poems it contains. Late Chosŏn anonymous *sosŏl* reduce or omit the verses if they are not primarily connected with the storyline. This might imply that the motif of wooing disappeared. However, the plot is impoverished only of the poems;[14] it is more direct and less romantic.[15]

11 In using this term, I am following Lubomír Doležel's theory of the possible worlds of fiction. Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore 1998).

12 The stories "Sŏnyŏ pulgŭn chumŏni" (The Red Sack of a Girl) and "Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn" are variants on the same motifs: the former is recorded in *T'aep'yŏng t'ongje* (All Affairs of the T'aep'yŏng Era), kwŏn 68, the second, in *Taedong unbu kunok* (The Rhymed Encyclopedia of the Eastern Kingdom), kwŏn 15. *Su i chŏn* (Seoul 2013), pp. 36–73, 74–81.

13 All twenty-five poems in the *Kuunmong* are of this nature.

14 A.F. Trotsevich indicated poetic communication as a means for plot retardation. From my point of view, this idea is applicable to the *p'ansori* genre, but not to all *kodae sosŏl*. See her foreword in *Ch'unhyang chŏn* (Moscow 1968), pp. 19–20.

15 In this context we do not take into consideration the early Chosŏn mannerism to tell part of the story in verses. This does not represent communication between protagonists, but only a way of writing prose. The same applies to *ch'ang* (solo) in *p'ansori*, as it is not poetry.

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A Chance for Testing a Partner

It was not always the boy or girl involved in the potential relationship that examined the qualities of the possible partner. Other people could also test their exceptionality, such as in Kim Manjung's *Sassi namjŏng ki* 謝氏南征記 (Journey of Lady Sa to the South), where the future father-in-law asks Lady Sa (through mediators) to write an inscription/poem to the painting of Kwanŭm 觀音.[16] The prospective mother-in-law in *Kuunmong* does the same. She organizes a poetry competition to find (also confirm) a wife for the main protagonist. The chief prerequisite for these types of poetic or musical examinations is that the protagonist is of marrying age (sixteen years old). It is at this age that the boy begins his pilgrimage that culminates in fame and marriage. The future spouses' first encounter is just a glance (made by the girl, the boy, or both concurrently). In the stories, the scenes that follow differ in the length of the lovers' meetings, in how these encounters influence the plot, in how the protagonists are separated, in the number of poems the protagonists exchange, and so forth. They also vary in who initiates the communication and in the number of wives the young man finally earns.[17] Irrespective of the uniformity of such meetings and the process of poetic dialogue (a spouse is successfully selected each time), this motif offers a broad scale of possible variants. It can be realized by poetic monologues, dialogues, in public or private competition, free or regular, with a specified theme, form, timing, and so forth.

Some meetings repeat Ch'oe Chi'wŏn's motif of visiting a remote tomb, such as in "Sŏnyŏ pulgŭn chumŏni" and other stories, where a poem recited in front of a grave is usually rewarded by love. Another frequent situation leading to the gaining of a lover starts with a scene in which a young man is overnighting in a house where a mother and daughter live. Either the visitor or the daughter begins to communicate with the other by playing a musical instrument or by reciting a poem or singing a song. A sexual encounter then follows.[18] Another popular motif is that of a literary session, where the prize is a night with a famous *kisaeng*. It is the *kisaeng*, judging the quality of the poems, who decides the winner.[19] Making poetry can be fair (dialogue) as to the number of participants, but also a "power play." In such a scene the male protagonist faces a crowd of women who have no ambitions to be his wife (*Unyŏng chŏn* 雲英傳, *Kuunmong*, *Kŭmo sinhwa* 金鰲新話); they simply wish to test his qualities. In *Kuunmong*, Yang Soyu composes poems,

16 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip III*, pp. 177–180, for a detailed analysis of the meaning of the Kwanŭm painting and Kim Manjung's work see Gregory Evon, *Salvaging Buddhism to Save Confucianism in Chosŏn Korea* (1392–1910) (Amherst 2023).

17 It is not common for a girl to make a choice between possible partners if it is not a public competition. In such situations, the arrival of the hero makes her future choice clear.

18 In this case, the girl does not refuse, but she hopes the young man will marry her in the end. See, for example, Kim Sisŭp's "Biography of Scholar Yi Who Peered over the Wall," where the parents finally deal with the young couple's love affair, or the same situation in *Cho Ung chŏn* (see later).

19 She is introduced as highly competent, for example, in a scene featuring a Loyang literary session in *Kuunmong*.

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and the empress dowager sees in him a prospective husband for her daughter. The same person (the empress dowager) initiates a poetry session for testing four future wives of the main hero.

Music instead of Poetry

In some stories, the future bride and groom meet thanks to their extraordinary abilities to play or understand music. Both are known as exceptional musicians, and their talent is demonstrated through a peculiar motif – dancing cranes. For example, in *Kuunmong* we read that "whenever the princess played the flute, cranes would gather in front of the building and dance to the music." Also, the empress dowager thinks she has to find such a remarkable player as in the past, when the daughter of the Duke of Ch'in met her husband. It seems as if she does find such an extraordinary musician; when the main protagonist plays a flute, all the cranes fly to his garden instead of to the princess's.[20]

Music-related sequences can be more straightforward. A young man or girl begins to express their excessive feelings by playing a musical instrument. Such a situation occurs in *Cho Ung chŏn* 趙雄傳 (Story of Cho Ung), where the girl is first to play and sing (she explicitly formulates her longing for a partner). A boy, located in another space, responds to her words with his own song as well as through his behaviour. Finally, he enters her room and coaxes her to spend the night with him.[21]

Relatively curious are situations initiated by a boy who tries to meet his future bride before he or his parents start to negotiate his marriage. Disguised as a nun, he intrudes upon the girl's family, and plays several famous pieces, ending with Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 (c. 179–117 BC) "Song of the Phoenix Seeking a Mate."[22] The girl reacts by leaving the place, because in her opinion, she, an unmarried girl, cannot hear such music, as Chŏng Kyŏngp'ae declares in *Kuunmong*,[23] in a variant on the same motif contained in *Chang Kukjin chŏn* 張國振傳 (Story of Chang Kukjin), that she "feels that something is wrong." [24] She has seen through the disguise, recognizing that it is a man who has come to observe her.[25] What we witness here is a type of selection, although one-sided and unfair to the girl. Not many wom-

20 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip IV*, p. 67.

21 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip II*, pp. 212–214.

22 In *Kuunmong*, the order of the songs is as follows: "The Rainbow Dress," "Flowers in the Jade Garden," "Eighteen Measures of the Barbarian Pipes," "Into Mongolia," "Song of Guangling," "The Water Fairy," "The Luxuriant Orchid," "Song of the Southern Breeze," and, finally, "Song of the Phoenix Seeking a Mate." Thus, these songs cover the famous, the strange, and the barbarian, and include compositions attributed to Confucius and the Emperor Shun. The last one is an insolent provocation referring to unacceptable love.

23 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip IV*, p. 42.

24 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip II*, p. 279.

25 Following this realization, the girl develops an aversion to the bridegroom, which is only temporary, or, as in *Kuunmong*, she decides to get revenge. Strangely, nobody speaks about the fact that she knows such an inappropriate song.

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en were able to play instruments and sing, or understand musical compositions; more though were trained in poetry composition.

In these stories, the poems are not always written down. A poem might be composed by one person but sung by another. Moreover, it is not clear if the protagonists sing, recite, or combine both with playing a musical instrument. In any case, when a man composes poetry, sings, or plays a musical instrument, it means he is introducing himself and proving his qualities, erudition, and skills in writing poetry. Nevertheless, every reader supposes his qualities, because he is on his way to gaining glory, to passing the state exams. His skills are incorporated into his portrait at the beginning of every story; he is depicted as a gifted boy in every aspect, equal to the famous men of ancient China – statesmen, generals, poets, musicians, calligraphers, painters, and so forth.[26] During the story, his skills are tested, and the plot culminates in the protagonist's success at the state examinations, which is predetermined by his central position in the novel.[27]

A Poem in Exchange for a Bride. Case study I: The Folklore Story of Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn

Only a few protagonists stand out from the otherwise uniform sixteen-year-old heroes and heroines of these stories. The best example is the folk retelling of the life of the famous poet Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn. The novel *Ch'oe Ch'ung chŏn* 崔忠傳 (The Story of the Faithful Ch'oe) is heavily interwoven with poems, which play a crucial role in the plot and demonstrate his extraordinary talent. Let us mention some episodes from the beginning of the story. The eleven-year-old fictitious Ch'oe, unlike the historical figure, recites his own poems, attracting the ear of the Tang emperor, who sends envoys to Silla. The emperor's men are beaten by the child in a poetic dialogue (competition). When the envoys return to China, they complain to the emperor, who decides to exact revenge on the entire kingdom. Another envoy brings to the Korean king a riddle with a threat of invasion. The Tang emperor's argument for military intervention is that "in Silla there are so many talented poets that it signifies disrespect to China."[28] Ch'oe solves the riddle, and thanks to him, relations between China and Korea remain peaceful. However, sometime after the first meeting with the envoys, Ch'oe sneaks into the house of the first minister Na and falls in love with his daughter. There, he breaks a mirror on purpose and sells himself as a serf to pay the debt. In the following scene, he meets the girl

26 The most complete is the portrait of Yang Soyu in *Kuunmong* "[…] he was as handsome as Pan Yu, he could write poems like Li Bo, his calligraphy would compare with that of Wang Xizhi, he was clever as famous strategists Sun Bin and Wu Qi. He was an expert on astronomy and geomancy […]" *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip IV*, pp. 17–18.

27 For details, see Miriam Löwensteinová, "Description of Hero in Korean Literature: From Myth to Classical Fiction", *AUC Philologica: Orientalia Pragensia* 14, no. 1 (2001), pp. 181–194; Kim Tae-gil, *Values of Korean People Mirrored in Fiction* (Seoul 1990).

28 *Ch'oe Ch'ung chŏn* (Moscow 1971), p. 31. The Tang emperor repeated this sentence several times.

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(his future bride) in the garden. She composes some verses (the first phrase of the poem) and sings them to herself:

> "Flowers are laughing under the veranda,
> the laugh is not heard."
> [Ch'oe continues]:
> "Birds are weeping behind the forest,
> tears are not seen."[29]

The girl, feeling ashamed because she was caught in an inappropriate situation, leaves, but from this moment on she believes in the boy's skills. A scene follows, in which Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn's extraordinary talent is proven for the second time: he helps Minister Na – under the condition that if successful he will marry the official's daughter – solves the riddle sent by the Chinese emperor and composes a response to him in the form of a poem. In doing so, he saves Silla from the threat of a Chinese invasion and gains the favour of his future father-in-law. He then gets married. At that time, he is thirteen.[30] This plot is rather exceptional, given that Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn is considered the first of the great Korean literati, not omitted in *sihwa*, *p'aesŏl*, anecdotes, and short prose works. This is why in this story the poetic motifs and the demonstration of the hero's abilities, intelligence, and education are exaggerated. Here, these types of situations outnumber the standard in *kodae sosŏl*. The protagonist is tested many times in this story, but for the purposes of this paper, relevant are only his poems written as dialogues with his future spouse and his dealings with his future father-in-law in which he exchanges his intellectual potential for permission to marry the man's daughter.[31]

Melancholy, Desire, Karmic Relations: What a Man Desires and What a Woman Wants

Tang dynasty novels and Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn's stories from the ninth and tenth centuries frequently feature a young scholar who comes to the grave of an anonymous woman and expresses his emotions (loneliness, sorrow) in a poem. This leads to the appearance of a girl who spends a night with him.[32] But this love-making is not explained as the result of passion for the unspecified woman. It happens by coincidence, simple chance, a twist of fate; it is something predetermined. Many other meetings between future lovers or spouses are explained by fate.

29 *Ch'oe Ch'ung chŏn,* pp. 38–39. D.D. Yeliseev has pointed out that this conversation as a whole is a poem written by Yi Kyubo. This is evidence that Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn's portrayal has been heavily skewed. Ibidem, p. 32.

30 In this way, the fiction follows Ch'oe's official portrayal in *Samguk sagi*, where he is twelve when leaving for China. *Samguk sagi,* ha 46:438.

31 I was unable to locate this motif in other works of fiction and believe that it likely does not exist elsewhere.

32 *Su i chŏn*, pp. 30–73.

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In the eighteenth-century novel *Ongnumong* 玉樓夢 (The Dream in the Jade Pavilion) everything important is pre-arranged in Heaven and decided when the protagonist – the drunken and bored Munch'ang – writes a poem on a lotus leaf. This poem is connected with the date (the 7th day of the 7th month) and implies a love meeting, because this refers to an old legend. This motif is developed in a conversation between the protagonist and heavenly fairies in the Jade Pavilion. The main hero meets all these fairies in his earthly life (in exile) as his wives. The poem – the cause of a future controversy – is a proposal for a romantic encounter but can be understood as a universal receipt, not addressed to the fairy who brings to him a lotus. The "exile on Earth " is in the form of a dream,[33] and all the participants of the heavenly meeting are expelled.[34] The plot continues in a predictable manner, full of romantic meetings and the protagonist's victories, until another dream occurs, in which the protagonists learn about their heavenly origin.[35] A meeting in a previous life and reminders of romantic encounters in the past justify the love meeting in this life. This motif is frequently encountered in other prose works, sometimes being shortened to a simple reminiscence of old and remote love and sin.

Many stories follow a typical sequence of a wish, a prayer, and an action, which we find, for example, in "Manboksa chop'o ki" 萬福寺樗蒲記 (Account of a Chŏp'o Game at Manbok Temple). The main hero, longing for a wife, plays a game with Buddha, and Buddha gives a woman to him. Their love affair is short and ends when he learns that she is dead, that she belongs among the ghosts (*wŏngwi* 寃鬼).[36] This manner of getting a woman, even for one night as a lover or for life as a wife, turns into a stable motif. Authors repeat this motif in a serious tone.[37] It also appears as a trick, for example, in *Kuunmong*, where one protagonist plays the role of a dead soul (also a heavenly fairy exiled to Earth). She communicates with the protagonist in poetry and visits him at his home.[38] In the same way functions the

33 This work of fiction is a dream novel, and thus, it offers a stable order of "sins" that lead to the exile of the heavenly people. In this prose, a fairy picks a lotus in Sakyamuni's realm, on its leaf Munch'ang writes a poem, this poem makes another fairy jealous, and she complains to the Jade Emperor. In the subsequent debate in the Jade Pavilion, the protagonists of the novel discuss the love affair on the examples taken from Chinese legends and find the love in Heaven something natural. This meeting is joined by Weaver (see hereafter) because she is allowed to come out that night. The motifs of Heaven, the Jade Emperor Palace, and the palace of the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母) appear in other novels, as well as the plucking of peach blossoms, flowers, peaches, composing poems on leaves, etc. The heavenly origin of the heroes implies a karmic relation.

34 In fact, they are only sleeping and dreaming about their exile. During this time, they will experience all the adventures and romances they are not allowed in their strict heavenly state.

35 *Ongnumong* 5:338–342.

36 Kim Sisŭp, *Kŭmo sinhwa,* in *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip I*, p. 11, 24.

37 Especially in *Kŭmo sinhwa*. We find direct poetic dialogue in "Yi saeng kyujang chŏn" 李生窺牆傳 (Biography of Scholar Yi Who Peered through the Wall), where the boy initiates the love affair but after hearing the girl reciting poetry.

38 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip IV*, pp. 48–56.

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apparent chance of the young man who wanders on his way to glory: in a house where he is overnighting he exchanges poems or music with a girl living there. A romantic encounter, whether voluntary or forced, follows. Poetry can also be a request for sex.[39]

Young men, unlike girls, have no special need for marriage. They have more pressing duties, as they are still on their way to becoming important people, they must pass the state examinations, and they have enemies to beat. In fact, if the main hero gets married before reaching the top, problems arise. In the real world, early marriages were common,[40] but in *kodae sosŏls* the protagonists first attain status and only then do they consider their private lives. As a graduate of the state examinations the hero is more attractive for future marriage. This is why he gets another girl on his way to glory, and another after becoming an important man. In some works of literature, the protagonist marries his main wife first; only after is he permitted to marry lesser wives and have concubines. We find this situation in several genres, not only in *kodae sosŏl*, but also, for example, in Im Pang's 任堕 (1640–1724) *Ch'ŏnyerok* 天倪錄 (Records of the Invisible Workings of Heaven). To have many wives can be a sign of immorality, as we see, for example, in *Kuunmong*.[41] In any case, in *kodae sosŏl* girls are more active in hunting bridegrooms; the male protagonists are mostly concerned with their desire, which leads to romantic episodes. Men's meetings with girls are explained by chance, by karmic relations, or is sometimes presented as a straightforward proposal. In such "wooing," poetry is more a custom than anything else.

Women's Arguments for their Inappropriate Activity

> "A woman has to follow her husband all her life," thought Ch'aebong to herself. "Her success, her failure, her happiness or unhappiness, all depend on him. That is why Zhuo Wenjun, when she was a widow, went after Sima Xiangru. I am still unmarried, and though I do not much care for the idea of being my own go-between in arranging an engagement, there is an old saying: Wise subjects choose their king. But I did not ask that young man who he was and where he lived, so if I want to ask my father later on to send a go-between for me, I'll have no idea where to send him."[42]

39 If the young hero does not ask the girl's parents for her hand in marriage, her suicide will necessarily follow. This motif is not common because this narrative deals with the not very desirable phenomenon of losing one's virginity. One full scene depicting such a "romantic encounter" is found in *Cho Ung chŏn* (The Story of Cho Ung).

40 In reality, it was rare for a sixteen-year-old to pass the state examination. Here, it is likely a metaphor for exceptionality.

41 In *Kuunmong*, the jealous Prince Wŏl accuses Yang Soyu of having many wives and concubines, implying that he does not have proper morality. In response, the hero argues that he married his main wives first, then the lesser wives and concubines. He stresses that this is the legal way.

42 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip IV*, p. 19. Cited after *Virtuous Women: Three Classical Novels*, translated by Richard Rutt and Kim Chong-un (Seoul 1979).

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Such monologues are frequently delivered by lonely girls sitting in their rooms, dreaming about getting married. Here, they express their willingness to accept fate, although they do wish to take the initiative. These female characters are aware they possess the required qualities, but also limited possibilities. Therefore, they gather arguments mostly from examples of girls and women who chose their husbands by themselves. They are also ready to forget the cardinal principles of obedience to their parents and established conventions. A woman's "price" on the marriage market is determined by several factors, and social position influences marriage status. A *kisaeng* has only one possibility, to become a concubine. A girl born to a noble but disgraced family will become a lesser wife. Because every male protagonist in the *kodae sosŏl* represents a model, he is predestined to marry a girl from a better family (that of a minister, king, emperor), sometimes at the expense of justice or order.[43] However, in most of these stories, the women consent to living with their beloved, no matter what kind of legal marriage they have.

In these stories, women engage in various activities for one purpose: to eventually get married. Thus, we encounter scenes in which a woman, after successfully demonstrating her abilities, returns home and waits quietly for her husband. The she-warrior stops fighting, the dancer stops dancing, and the murderess stops killing.[44] Men, in contrast, engage in short-term activities and initiatives connected with the erotic because they are predestined to continue on their path to glory. On the other hand, women face many limitations. They must live in a certain place, and if they want to have a husband, they must leave that place and violate prescribed rules. They have to attract a man, communicate with him, tie him up. To succeed, they cannot keep following Confucian norms; they need to offer more than the standards allow. Their enticements include composing poetry, singing, playing a musical instrument, and fighting. Girls in these stories are also proficient in astrology, medicine, exorcism, sorcery, and so forth. After proving her skills,[45] the female protagonist usually returns to her initial position and, after getting married, ceases to take these excursions out of her limited space. *Kisaeng*s are an exception, but they too are always tied to a certain place and limited in their actions.

When a *kisaeng* woos a man, even in her thoughts, it is mostly straightforward: when she meets a prospective young man and she feels there is an opportunity to become a part of his family in the future, she spends the night with him (*Kuun-*

43 A typical situation is when a family of higher status decides to cancel the hero's previous engagement. After the protagonist protests, however, he is allowed to marry both girls. The most acute is the plot in *Kuunmong*, where Yang Soyu takes a risk in writing a sharp letter to the emperor, full of arguments and allusions to ancient times. Some people, as he mentions, marry with ambitions of achieving higher status, but others remain in poverty with a wife, whom they married before.

44 Married women still write poetry and sing, but only for their husbands. This poetry or music is not necessary for the plot and is therefore not mentioned in the stories.

45 Female characters proficient in martial arts, astronomy, astrology, medicine, or magic are "desirable helpers," who can substitute for the main hero in wars and whenever there is serious danger.

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mong, *Ongnumong*). In other variants of this motif she saves the protagonist from his enemies as in *Ok Tanch'un chŏn* 玉丹春傳 (Story of Ok Tanch'un). The *kisaeng*'s thoughts are clear: she offers herself as a concubine, but only after he fulfils his "duties" as a man, including passing the exams. Frequently, she selflessly recommends to him a proper bride (e.g., a minister's daughter). Such advice could influence her future position in the family. The thoughts of other characters and their behaviour are straightforward, but it mostly refers to the predetermined nature (fate) of the meeting and ends with a proposal to make love.[46] In some cases, this argument is even applied to explain the loss of a girl's virginity.[47]

Literati Sessions, Seven-Step Poems (*ch'ilposi* 七寶詩), and Women's Competitions

Literary sessions are typically depicted in *kodae sosŏl* as follows: A young man arrives – on his way to the capital – in a small, traditional town, where he decides to take a rest. He chances upon a group of literati who ask him to join them. He learns they are having a poetry competition with a prize, which is a *kisaeng*, who also serves as the judge. She is fully competent in poetry, the literati say, and nobody doubts her judgement. However, it is not evident if her decision about the winner, the protagonist, reflects the quality of his poetry or her interest in the stranger. They end up making love, and the hero makes vague promises about the future. In later stories, such meetings are shortened, and the competition is not described in detail, but the result is the same.[48] Every literati session is depicted as a competition. Sometimes the attendees would mock a stranger, a man of lower status, or a man who does not belong to a specific place (town, palace, house).

However, we also encounter such sessions where no specific prizes are awarded. In *Ch'unhyang chŏn* (Story of Ch'unhyang) we read about a procession of *kisaengs* at the house of the new governor, all of whom try to attract him. The governor examines the *kisaeng*s, and because he is a wicked person, he seeks only to satisfy his own lust. On the other hand, all the *kisaeng*s know that they have a rare opportunity to gain a position and benefits. They perform songs and dance, but do

46 The most poetic but also erotic is a versed dialogue in *Ch'unhyang ka*. This dialogue is started by Yi Monnyŏng with an innocent love jab, then continues in a sentimental tone. Then Ch'unhyang takes the initiative, and the scene ends in making love. The whole scene is naïve, in keeping with the age of the protagonists, and thanks to this naivety the perspective of time, space, and the whole subject disappear. Many variants of such a scene can be found elsewhere, for example, in *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip V*, pp. 28–36; *Ch'unhyang chŏn*.

47 Losing one's virginity must always be approved by omens and authority. In *Cho Ung chŏn* we find this order of events: both protagonists produce music (determination). Then follows a dream in which the girl's dead father accompanies her to the hero and explains to her that the young man is her future husband (authority). In the same dream, she sees the hero as a dragon, playing with five-colour clouds with the stars of the Great Dipper (omen).

48 It is obvious that he wins this competition. The literati gathered at the session react angrily and even seek revenge. See *Kuunmong* (in Luoyang) and *Ongnumong* (in Suzhou).

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not recite their own poetry.[49] The point of this procession is for the women to offer their services as professionals, not for them to prove their skills. The governor will choose a woman based on his own taste, not on their qualities.

In *Kuunmong*, we read about a literati session where the protagonist, Yang Soyu, is asked to prove his fame. He – in a drunken state – composes and writes poems on fans to palace ladies, at the request of the empress dowager: she would like to observe him. In *Unyŏng chŏn*, Prince Anp'yŏng takes a personal approach to a literary session held in his palace. He asks all his palace ladies (who are his pupils as well) to write a poem. He finds all the compositions to be well written; only Unyŏng's is – he says – not correct because it is too emotional, not technical.[50] In the first situation, the text of the novel does not specify how many ladies are present and how many poems the hero writes.[51] In the second one, every poem is cited, and the name of every female author is mentioned, which is not necessary for the plot because only one of them is important. Such scenes are not very frequent: for romantic stories, only the dialogue between the protagonists is crucial, and this session is only a prelude to it. In *Kuunmong* one of these poems leads to another one, a reminiscence of a past meeting; in *Unyŏng chŏn* the poetic session is a prelude to a tragic love story, in which there are only two protagonists: Unyŏng and Kim *chinsa*.

Several scenes with poetic dialogues are contained in *Kuunmong*, in which the main hero wanders throughout all of China. On his way, he collects eight girls whom he had already met in his previous life. His meeting with each girl is different. Five of them take the form of a poetic exchange. Let us mention one of them, a very specific presentation of poetry as a competition between the hero's future wives. During Yang's absence in the capital, his private affairs become so complicated that the empress dowager decides to deal with the situation. All four candidates are asked to write a poem on a specific theme and in a certain mode. The conditions are prescribed by the empress dowager. She looks out of the window and sees a magpie, which is not only a lucky omen but also a symbol of love and marriage. She decides that the girls must write their poems in the time it takes to walk seven steps.[52] This seven-step limit is considered a more-or-less formal feature; the text of the novel explicitly states that the court lady takes her steps slowly. Also, the poems are not evaluated following any strict criteria, and

49 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip V*, pp. 45–48.

50 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip V*, pp. 83–84, 84–85.

51 He receives a cup of alcohol in return for every poem, and thus, he is drunk after coming home.

52 The seven-step poem first appeared in a famous Chinese anecdote about the Cao brothers of third-century China: Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226), the Emperor Wen of Wei 魏文帝, and Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), one of the most famous poets in China. The older brother was allegedly jealous because of Cao Zhi's fame and asked him to compose a poem within the time it took to take seven steps; if not, he would be executed. As the anecdote says, Cao Zhi successfully wrote a poem. Because there are several versions of this legend, the poems about it differ. Some scholars consider the poem not authentic, see Robert Joe Cutter (trans.), Paul W. Kroll (ed.), *The Poetry of Cao Zhi* (Boston 2021), p. 215n1.

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their quality has no influence on the empress dowager's decision – after all, she has already picked her daughter for the marriage, even though her poem is not good at all.[53] The girls write, submit, read, and discuss their poems. For all of them, there seems to be an everydayness about composing poetry. They are well versed in writing; some of them prove their abilities in interactions with the hero before this competition. Two of them are even popular musicians.[54] The point of this *ch'ilposi* "competition" is not to select a partner; the decision has already been made. Moreover, the main hero is excluded from this process. What the empress dowager arranges is more or less an order in the private lives of the participants, and nobody protests.

Indicators of Love

I have already described common situations in which poetry is composed in *kodae sosŏl*, the purpose of which is to get acquainted with a future partner. In these works, the act of creating poetry (decision and argumentation) and the reasons it is created (making love and marriage) are most important. The vocabulary used in these poems is relatively limited, and usually comes from one of three legends. The poems often refer to the legend of *Kyŏnu Chinnyŏ* 牽牛 織女, in which two stars in the sky are divided by the *Milky Way* (*Ŭnhasu* 銀河水). They are allowed to meet once a year (on the seventh day of the seventh month), when *magpies* 鵲 and *crows*烏 make a *bridge* over the Milky Way. *Rain* is often mentioned here (before the meeting, rain signifies *tears* of joy, the day after, *tears* of sorrow). All these motifs from this legend function as a code for a romantic encounter. The Chinese legend about the *Wushan fairy* 巫山神女and *King Xiang* 襄王, which refers directly to the erotic, functions in the same way. This fairy appears to Xiang as a *cloud* and as *rain* as well. If such motifs (or even just these words) are present in a poem, they symbolize sex. The third evident source of vocabulary is the story of the famous poet *Sima Xiangru* and *Zhuo Wenjun*, a young widow who leaves her home because of love (i.e., she breaks the strict rules for women). Here, we encounter the "Song of the Phoenix Seeking a Mate," allegedly a song with which the poet seduces Zhuo. Other legends and figures do not occur very frequently in the stories, but they always are drawn from Chinese culture.

We can illustrate this fact using two poems as examples. The first one is "inappropriate" due to its excessive emotions (*Unyŏng chŏn*); the second one (*Ongnumong*) is considered by the Jade Emperor (and after him the Heavenly fairy) to be "unduly earthly."[55]

53 In fact, this competition is held because of her; this is why the empress dowager cannot exclude her own daughter due to her inferior poetry.
54 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip IV*, pp. 99–102.
55 *Ongnumong* 1:11–12.

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Gazing to the distance, where the bluish fog is rising,
a wonderful girl stops to weave the white silk.
She exposes her face to the wind, she is sad in loneliness,
her mind is flying, settles to the Wu Mountains.[56]

The motif of the *lonely weaver* 織女 here evokes the first of the three above-mentioned legends in its broader context; the allusion to *Wushan* 巫山 is a reference to love-making. Both the weaver and Wushan have stable connotations *sorrow* and unspecified *longing* are significant "inappropriate" emotions.

The second poem was written on the festival marking the seventh day of the seventh month, and Munch'ang, the main hero of the novel, composes it for the fairy, who throws to him a lotus leaf, an offer to make love. This poem is enriched by the symbolism associated with the date. The allusions in the following debate not only touch upon the fixed lexicon (*Milky Way*, *Kyŏnu and Chingnyŏ*, *tears* over the Milky Way, *magpies*) but also refer to other people connected with love and beauty (especially the Chinese goddesses Magu and Chang'e).

Lotuses in the Moche waters,
the pale wave washes.
Why not pluck the flower
when spring brings it to me?[57]

Other motifs and cultural symbols functioning as markers for this kind of poetry are flowers, birds, especially those known for their fidelity (wild geese, orioles), peach blossoms, and peaches. Being ready for love is symbolized by the moon, the night, and tears, as mentioned above. If such coded language is used in a dialogue, the response naturally has to include the same words.

Case study II: *Unyŏng chŏn* and *Kuunmong*

Two novels transcend average romantic stories not only with their refined plots but also by their connecting of poetry to the storyline. In *Unyŏng chŏn* (also known as *Susŏnggung mongyurok* 壽聖宮夢遊錄, The Dream Record from Susŏng Palace), a relatively concise text, poetry is dominant; poems serve as key points in this tragic story of prohibited love. The poetic line starts with Unyŏng's expression of her unspecified and contextually inappropriate longing, or melancholy, and a poem

56 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip V*, p. 85.

57 *Ongnumong* 1:14. The Buddhist pantheon protests against this unrestrained atmosphere, and Shakyamuni is angry because a lotus has been plucked from his territory. He responds with the following poem rejecting the previous coding and exiles the sinners:
The lotus comes into flower,
spring is bringing it to me.
For sages
A flower is equal to wisdom.
See *Ongnumong* 1:20.

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sharing the same sentiment is written by her future partner, young Kim. Thereafter, the poems focus on affection, before eventually reflecting the desire of the main hero. The protagonists fall in love, but they must keep their relationship a secret; they have a love affair and spend nights together. In the end, they both kill themselves. The story contains fifteen poems, which are authored by – besides the main heroes – Prince Anp'yŏng 安平大君 (1418–1453)[58] and ten of his court ladies, who are well educated in composing poetry. These women are highly qualified, competent poetesses. The prince divides them into two groups, implying a latent rivalry between them. This rivalry does not concern their future spouses (marriage is prohibited for them forever), but they fight for the favour – consciously or subconsciously – of the prince, which can be some kind of "love," but not the kind of love that leads to romance. Prince Anp'yŏng's girls serve him and also his special visitors, but they do not provide personal pleasure (like *kisaeng* do). They are there only for pure intellectual entertainment. [59] Their education was systematic and sophisticated, as Unyŏng explains to the narrator:

> […] In the beginning, he taught us the proper behaviour by recitation; then we read *Zhongyong* 中庸 (The Doctrine of the Mean); *Daxue* 大學 (The Great Learning); *Lunyu* 論語 (The Analects of Confucius); *Mengzi* 孟子 (Mencius); *Shijing* 詩經 (The Book of Songs); *Shujing* 書經 (The Book of Documents); *Zizi Tongjian* 資治通鑑 (A Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government); *Songshu* 宋書 (The Book of Song Dynasty); and others. He selected hundreds of poems written by Li Bo 李白 and Du Fu 杜甫 and from *Tangyin* 唐音 (The Tang Rhymes). In five years we all developed our talents. When the prince came, we could not leave; he pressed us by rewards and punishments.[60]

The prelude introduces Unyŏng at a literary session, initiated by Prince Anp'yŏng. He asks all ten of his girls to compose poems, and he evaluates their impromptu creations. The poems are mostly purposeless texts, demonstrating poetic skills, full of clichés and formal perfection, that is, nothing exceeding the average quality. Anp'yŏng and his ladies do not compose poetry that can serve as the foundation of the plot or provide motifs. Instead, their compositions simply colour the text as antipodes to the highly pathetic emotionality of both the protagonists. The only poem about which the prince has some reservations is Unyŏng's, as demonstrated above. Nevertheless, allusions to the love meeting in her poem open the following plot.[61] At this moment, a person from outside enters and joins Unyŏng.

58 Prince Anp'yŏng was the third son of King Sejong 世宗 (r. 1418–1450) and known as a talented calligrapher and poet.

59 The prince's idea of training palace ladies in poetry is interesting, of course, but these ladies' isolation is definite and their usefulness temporary because their education and skills are connected with their beauty.

60 Here, we find the sole enumeration of the curriculum needed for composing poetry. Nevertheless, it reflects the extended Confucian canon as well. *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip V*, p. 82.

61 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip V*, p. 85.

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Kim is a famous poet, he is a good fit for Unyŏng, and he is of the same disposition (both compose melancholic poetry, both feel that something is missing in their lives). Such a setup of the plot cannot conclude with a happy ending, as their love is not allowed by the rules of the palace.

A critical situation arises at another poetry session; the prince is ready to show his girls' skills to somebody from the outside. In this scene, the girls function as standard maids or court ladies; they do not display their talents.[62] Kim composes a poem with a motif evoking autumn melancholy, which includes a second quatrain, in which he slightly touches the one he desires, who is not explicitly named.[63] The following poetic communication concentrates on the lovers until they their secret relationship was revealed that leads to Unyŏng's suicide and Kim's voluntary death.[64] Poetry is a crucial element in *Unyŏng chŏn*, and it is represented here in two ways. The first type of poetry is formal, prescriptive, fitting the aim and taste of the prince. However, the story's plot is built on a second kind of poetry mirroring the inner world of the protagonists; this poetry represents pure, true poetry, though it causes the death of the heroes.

Kuunmong shows another face of poetic communication. It is a novel that we can interpret as a "compensation dream" of an unsatisfied and confused monk, who complains about his (ascetic and monotonous) life and whose visions about his earthly career are realized in an opulent dream. In the beginning, the protagonist's explicitly positive statement about a life full of glory and splendour is crucial. One spring day he meets eight fairies who awaken his senses and materialize his entire sense of usefulness. His teacher sends him to dream, where he finds all humans can reach. His dream is full of women – eight to be exact, the same as the number of fairies (hence *Ku-un-mong*, the "dream of the nine"; the number includes the main hero), positions as a civil and military officer. "His" bevy of women is very diverse; they come from different geographical locations and social classes, ranging from a princess and the daughter of a minister to *kisaengs*, the daughter of the Dragon king, and a murderer. The girls eventually form an ideal family. These eight ladies in *Kuunmong* show the variety of character depictions in this genre. Five of them communicate with the protagonist through poetry, and three of them prove themselves as excellent musicians and extraordinary dancers.

The situations in which one of the girls has the opportunity to test the hero as a partner with a poetic dialogue are as follows: i) a local *poetry session or competition*, in which the hero wins and spends a night with a *kisaeng*; ii) communication with a girl pretending to be a *fairy* or a *wŏngwi* (both meetings are copies of situations in previous literary works: the fairy tells a story about her exile because of a "sin"

62 "[…] the prince asked Kŭmyŏn to sing, Puyong to play *kŏmungo*, Poryŏn to play flute, and I was obliged to hold the inkstone." *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip V*, p. 87.

63 This is followed by a dialogue with the prince on the theme of poetry, not important for the plot itself. It only extends the scene, in which the future lovers spend time together.

64 The whole story is told by another scholar, who comes to Anp'yŏng's desolate palace, gets drunk, and calls the souls of lovers, who would like to tell their story to him.

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in Heaven; the *wŏngwi* is pleased by the hero's interest and his poem; both situations result in sex); iii) a dialogue in which the *initiator* of the communication is a *girl convinced this man is worthy of being her husband*; iv) this dialogue continues in the palace, where the protagonist is asked to write *poems to court ladies* and the empress dowager observes the possible bridegroom for her daughter (the dialogue is tied with the girl in situation iii); v) *seven-step poems* (*ch'ilposi*) written by four of the future wives of the hero, initiated by the empress dowager. Here, there is a fixed theme, "On Hearing a Happy Magpie in the Peach Blossoms," announcing the wedding. These impromptu compositions have a certain form and time limit (seven-syllable quatrain and seven-step poem)[65] and contain details that comment upon the writing process. The court lady was "worried that the girls would not be able to finish writing their poems before she had gone seven steps, so she looked back at them to watch the flying brushes and took her steps slowly. The brushes moved as quickly as the wind and rain and both poems were handed in before the girl had gone five paces."[66] Interesting is the vi) poetic session of Prince Wŏl and the main hero after a hunting trip. It does not lead to a marriage: neither men are composing poetry for a girl. This situation comprises a whole chapter in the book; it is a competition between the women of their houses in poetry, music, and dancing.

Kuunmong is the richest *kodae sosŏl* in terms of its heroes, plot, and subplots. It contains many situations that influenced later works. It fully uses the motif of composing poetry and poetic dialogues (as well as monologues) for wooing in all the above-mentioned situations. All the twenty-five poems are purposeless; they are just means for moving the plot forward. The poems stabilize the logical order and the content of the examination – wooing, meeting, acquaintance – the steps necessary before getting married.

Conclusions

Freely choosing a partner in Chosŏn Korea was limited and in fact nearly impossible. However, the fictitious space of the *kodae sosŏl* genre gave readers (mostly women) a broad spectrum of virtual opportunities. Becoming acquainted with and fighting for an ideal partner took place not only on an earthly plane; appropriate partners could come from the heavenly spheres or from other worlds, from the palace of the Jade Emperor or the palace of the Queen Mother of the West. Sometimes Buddha or Yama sent the protagonists to Earth. These stories therefore offered attractive scenarios, ones that readers could never experience in reality. Nonetheless, they could still identify with the protagonists and thus "participate" in their prohibited communications and the process of selecting a partner.

For every romantic acquaintance, communication in poetry (whether sung, recited, or written in the form of a letter) is necessary. It is akin to the ritual opening

65 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip IV*, p. 82.
66 *Han'guk kojŏn munhak chŏnjip IV*, p. 102

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of this communication, which, irrespective of the initial situation, ends with marriage – a desirable state that everybody must respect as a duty. What is exciting for readers is the interlude between the status of being prepared for marriage and the marriage itself.

Poetry in these novels follows formal conventions; the vocabulary is simple, and the poems are mediocre. They differ slightly in their messages and the extent to which they influence the plot; some poems have no connection to it, whereas others are extremely coded. Without decoding them, the reader cannot understand the message. Wooing through poetry developed over the centuries: it first appeared in extensive poetic dialogues contained in Kim Sisŭp's *Kŭmo sinhwa* and in Kim Manjung's *Kuunmong*. Later in the Chosŏn era we encounter the same situations but depicted in shortened form, due to the familiarity of the motif; the same lexical code, now reduced, serves as a signal or indicator of a romance. Every reader knows that this situation, motif, or code is a part of a romantic story, in which the protagonists freely choose a partner, and the partner has to prove his qualities in keeping with the standards of the genre. Both the details of their first meeting – when the lovers share a glance or one of them glances at the other – and the vocabulary of the poems reveal something about the purpose of the communication and its objective. Testing a future partner or partners definitely fulfils all the expectations of a young man or woman, living their prescribed lives, in which there is no place for a phase of youth, to which all the above-mentioned romantic scenes belong.

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